

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

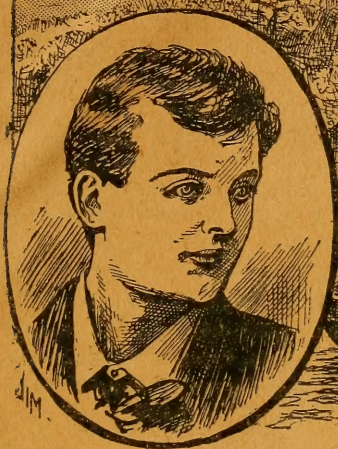
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The Island School



OLD CHORKER, AFTER A FIGHT TO KEEP HIS BALANCE, PITCHED HEADLONG INTO THE SEA.

The Island School.



CHAPTER I.

THE MAIL-BOAT.—LETTERS FOR FERMENTERA.



JUNE is a sunny month in the Mediterranean, and the sun never shone brighter in all its glory than on a certain day in that month, in the year one thousand eight hundred and eighty-seven.

Ploughing over the golden glittering deep, a mail-steamer, carrying the Spanish

flag, was bearing east, when a boat with a lateen sail drew right across her path and let her canvas down. The act was apparently a mad one, but that little boat must have been expected, for the steamer at the same time slowed down, and veering a bit from her course, avoided a collision.

There were three sunburnt youngsters in the boat, one of whom sang out cheerily, in the English tongue, "Mail-boat from Fermentera, please."

"All right, my lad," sang out the first officer, who was in charge of the deck. "Now then, you post-office sluggards, where are the bags?"

Two panting mail-sorters and guardians of his Spanish Majesty's mails came hurrying up from below, each with a sack upon his shoulders. The boat with the youngsters had by this time drifted close in, and

the sacks were lowered into her by two smart sailors.

"Is that all?"

"All, and enough, too, I should think. Do you want the correspondence of the earth for your island school?"

The question and answer having been exchanged, the boat was pushed away, and her lateen sail smartly hoisted.

"Good-day to all of you!" sang out the trio of youngsters, in a chorus.

The post-office officials grunted something, not entirely intelligible, the mate responded with a cheery good-bye, some of the sailors grinned, and the little crowd of passengers leaning over the side, fore and aft, gave the boys a hearty parting word. Then the screw of the mighty steamer revolved, backing her a bit before they headed quite clear of the tiny boat. The wind caught the sail, and away went the small craft one way and the steamer the other, at such a pace that in a few minutes there was the better part of a mile between them.

Some of the passengers continued to wave their handkerchiefs or hats, and the boys, who were in sailor costume, answered by raising their caps until these movements of friendly adieu became indefinite in the distance.

Then the youngsters turned their attention to the mail-bags, one of them at the same time looking to the steering of the boat.

"You've a pretty good cheek of your own, Jim

Gordon," said one, as he turned the bags over, "to ask if this was all, considering that it is the heaviest mail ever known for the school."

"It might have been heavier for all that," replied Gordon, coolly; "there was no harm in asking. Besides, it is like *your* cheek to speak of it to me. Who is the captain of the sailing boats, Lal Brodie? Answer me that, if you please?"

"You are," replied Lal.

"Then why in the name of tarnation do you put impertinent questions to *me*?"

"Because I did not know it was impertinent. What say you, Stiff?"

"Cheek is pretty well apparent in the pair of you," said Stiff, laughing; "but I think Gordon takes the cake."

"Silence fore and aft!" shouted Gordon, in the authoritative tone of a naval captain.

"Ay, ay, sir!" replied the other two, and for a few moments they were quiet.

The boat sped across the water in the direction of land lying five or six miles away. The sail that bore her along seemed to be tremendously tall for the boat, but she carried it gallantly, having a deep keel and plenty of ballast in the form of shingle in small sacks. Presently Brodie gravely saluted the youth at the helm.

"May we sink the official, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, for a time," was the reply.

"All serene, Gordon," said Brodie, promptly changing his tone and manner. "Now as this is the first time I have been out to meet the mails, being only just appointed to the crew of the 'Swallow'" (that was the name of the little craft), "may I ask how we get our letters if we miss the mail-boat?"

"We never miss it in fine weather," was the reply.

"But it has been done, I reckon," persisted Brodie, "and then, where are they left?"

"At Minorca, and we have to trust to a Spanish trader to bring the mail to us."

"Which they do, of course?"

"In their own good time," said Gordon, with a shrug. "They are a rough lot, for trader and smuggler here are synonymous terms."

"Sometimes," said Stiff, "the launch goes to Minorca to fetch the bags."

"It hasn't been for a year," said Jim Gordon, "because our own Napoleon got into trouble with some big Spanish toff living there."

"What was the row about?" It was Brodie who put the question.

"Nobody knows," replied Jim Gordon; "but since then our mighty chief won't allow even the would-be hucksters of Spanish origin to land on the island of Fermentera."

"Has he a full right to stop them?"

"I suppose so. Anyway, he pays a subsidy to the Spanish Government for the entire control of the island."

"And it had no inhabitants?"

"There were a few, I believe; but when Napoleon Farrell made a bargain to hold it for a term of years, the Government induced the small number of residents to leave."

"Paid them out, I suppose?"

"No. Took them away in a boat by the scruff of their necks, howling and protesting. Of course, that was before our school was established; but I have heard, and really think, that something will come of it one day. Your true Spaniard never forgives a wrong, and it was one, you know; for the island is a beautiful place, and they were very happy there. The people had really no ruler over them, and I fancy they made it a smuggler's station. But that is not our affair."

"It was a thundering good idea, starting a school like ours," said Stiff, "where a fellow gives his mornings to his books, and his afternoons to learning some useful business or profession. How many are there of us now?"

"With the three that arrived last night overland and per fishing-smack," said Gordon, "we made up the two hundred, or there may be one over. I won't be sure."

"Here's a boat bearing down upon us," said Brodie, pointing aft.

They gazed in the direction of his extended forefinger, and about a mile in the rear beheld a boat, rigged as theirs was, but at least double the size, gaining upon them hand over hand.

Her sail was enormous, tapering towards the sky, with a small red flag fluttering at the topmost point.

There seemed to be at least half-a-dozen men in her, and there might be more, but at that distance it was impossible to say.

"I wonder what he is up to," muttered Gordon. "He is coming direct for us. I don't like the look of it. Give the canvas another hoist, you two. We'll make for home smart."

"What can the fellow do to us?" asked Brodie.

"Run us down if he has a mind to," quietly answered Jim Gordon; "anyway, I had orders not to get too near any of the native craft. The mail-boat is gone."

"Her hull is below the horizon," said Stiff.

"Then she can see nothing. On my word I think that fellow means mischief. Give the sail another pull, my boys! Up with her! That's it! Now, if you lie over this side, we shall not have the fear of capsizing."

The boat in the rear responded with a similar hoisting of her lateen sail. Gordon, looking back, saw

the men at work upon it. But it appeared to him that she was already in full trim.

Still the attempt to get more way on her tended to confirm his suspicions. He was now pretty well certain that the stranger meant mischief.

The "Swallow" responded to the hoisting of her sail to its limit with increased speed, but for all that it was evident the stranger gained on them. The wind came from the north-east, about the best quarter when heading for the island, being well on her quarter without being quite abeam.

So the boats raced for a quarter of an hour, the boys scarcely saying a word, but watching the stranger closely.

The distance between them had by that time been shortened by a third.

"My eye!" exclaimed Brodie, suddenly, "she's got some speed on her."

"Built for it," briefly explained Jim Gordon; "she's a smuggler by trade, I'll warrant, and sluggards are not wanted in that line. Don't stare at her any longer, but just keep a side eye on her, Brodie. Report when I ask you how she is getting along. Stiff, go forward, and sham coiling that rope. You had better keep to windward still, as we have as much canvas as we can carry in this breeze."

"What's your game?" asked Brodie in a whisper, as Stiff crept forward.

"The crew must not question the captain," answered Gordon. "Is she still coming straight at us?"

"As straight as an arrow."

"All right. Don't take any notice of her, but sham taking things easy. Smile as you talk, and look as if you didn't know she was within a hundred miles of us."

"How silent they are on board! As a rule these fellows are jabbering and singing all the time."

"Well, you would not hear much of them at that distance, but I daresay they are quiet."

"She's coming along," muttered Brodie, a few minutes later; "I can see the crew as clearly as if they were alongside."

"How many?" asked Gordon.

"One, two, three—seven, and every one of the beggars staring straight at us."

"No doubt. How far away now?"

"Not more than two furlongs—not so far. Say a furlong and a half."

"Stiff," said Jim Gordon, "obey orders, will you? You are staring at that boat."

"Beg pardon, cap," said Stiff, deferentially, "couldn't help it."

"Stick to your job, and don't so much as blink. Coming on, Brodie?"

"Faster than ever. She seems to have got an extra

bit of breeze with her. The fellows are as silent as a crew of dead men."

"And staring hard at us?"

"As hard as they can. A black-muzzled lot."

Jim Gordon said no more for the next few minutes, but sat looking ahead at the island, which was now well within sight. Objects of moderate size could be seen on the shore. But there were no signs of living beings or of dwellings. The boat was making straight for a creek that was from that distance no more than a dent in the side of the island.

"Jim," whispered Brodie, who was biting his underlip, and looked rather pale and anxious, "she's not half a furlong behind us."

"Tell me when she is but a cable's length from us," was the quiet reply.

"How she steals along! I can scarcely hear the lapping of water against her bows."

"You can't hear it at all, Brodie, it is your fancy. The native craft makes little or no sound whatever. They are built for quiet voyaging. Don't look behind you. Stiff, for the last time, do as you are told. Sham being asleep, if you can do nothing else."

"All right," muttered Stiff, "but I'll be hanged if I can see your game."

"She's coming right up," said Brodie, "*at us*, Gordon."

"Yes, I guessed as much."

"It looks as if *she means to run us down*."

"I am sure she does," said Gordon, quietly. "When she is within twenty feet of us rub your nose with your forefinger."

"What on earth for?"

"Do as you are told, you duffer. It's a signal they won't understand. Now, then, not another word. Lean back and look happy."

"I wish I could," muttered Brodie. "As far as the leaning back goes I can do it to perfection, but to look happy when I may be swimming for my life in two minutes or so, is more than *I can do*."

"When it comes to swimming it will be all over with you," said Gordon. "Those blackguards will prevent that."

Jim Gordon, still keeping one hand on the tiller, stooped down, and thrusting his hand into one of the bags of ballast—the mouth was not tied—fished out a stone almost as big as his fist.

Holding it low and out of the sight of anyone not within a few feet of the craft, he awaited the signal from Brodie.

Stealthily, as some monster fish in pursuit of prey, the stranger boat bore down upon them. Brodie tried to keep cool and to appear at his ease, but it was difficult work. Sitting with his eyes half-closed, he kept a sidelong watch upon one who may justly be called the enemy.

Suddenly, with a jerky action, he raised his hand to his nose, and violently rubbed it as if a fly had stung him.

Jim coolly waited a few seconds more, and then put the rudder hard up, and sheered off to leeward with the speed of a horse taking a sharp turn while running in an open field.

The next moment the stranger vessel shot by, her crew uttering a yell of disappointment.

Jim started up, holding the tiller between his knees, and cast the stone he held at the man who was steering the other boat.

He was a swarthy, handsome man, with a wild, ferocious expression of face, the latter probably caused by his being foiled in his purpose by the dexterity of a boy.

The stone caught him fairly on the side of the head, and he fell from his seat as if he had been shot.

Immediately there was confusion on board the stranger, for the rudder being loosened, the boat veered round broadside to the wind, and threatened to capsize.

Jim Gordon, steering past the stern of the disorganised boat, speedily put the better part of a furlong between him and the malicious scoundrels.

"By George!" exclaimed Brodie, as he recovered his breath, "that was neatly done, Jim."

Stiff said nothing, he was so utterly taken aback by the manoeuvre so successfully executed.

"I reckon," said Jim, complacently, "that I had him there. How are they getting on?"

He was steering for the creek, which was now less than a mile away, and had to watch for certain rocks and shoals he knew of.

"They've got the boat round on the back tack," replied Brodie, "and another fellow is at the helm. The original party is holding his jaw and shaking his fist in this direction."

"Let him shake it till it drops off from his wrist," said Jim; "his game was to run us down, I was sure of that; but whether he intended to open a course of vengeance against us, which I fancy we are threatened with, or whether his game was to get the mail-bags for plunder, I can't say; but we shall soon know all about it."

"Our chief, Napoleon Farrell, ought to know of this attempt."

"I shall tell him, of course," said Jim Gordon, "but as a chief in the time of war I fancy our own Napoleon won't be worth much. We shall have to look elsewhere, or take care of ourselves."

"I wonder why he was christened Napoleon," said Brodie, musing.

"His father bore a strong resemblance to that mighty man, and he is like his father," said Jim Gordon; "so the name was given him—I have his

assurance it was so, but I won't vouch for the truth of it. Anyhow, he is a very good imitation of the little corporal who once set Europe in a blaze. Here we are, home again from the perils of the deep."

As he spoke the "Swallow" glided into the creek, up which she moved with easy grace, losing most of the breeze in the shelter of the high rocks on either side.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT SCHOOL OF FERMENTERA.



THE creek widened a short distance from the shore, opening out into a small lagoon. On the sea side of it were rocks, among which ferns and many varieties of flowers and shrubs grew in wild luxuriance, forming a picture of natural horticultural beauty that would have graced the grounds of a nobleman. Indeed, it may be doubted if in all the garden splendours of our cultivated grounds at home anything to compare with it could be found.

On the inland side the ground sloped gradually from the shore to a wooded height, and fronting it was what at first sight looked like a small town, dominated by an ancient castle.

The castle was genuine, but the apparent town was a collection of modern buildings, erected by Mr. Napoleon Farrell, generally spoken of as Nap Farrell.

They were entirely built of wood, for economical purposes, but for all that, the effect was that of substantiality.

In the centre was the main building, where two hundred boys were educated, fed, and generally cared for. Into the internal economy of the school we need not at present go. On either side stood a number of minor erections, used as workshops and for a variety of other purposes, in connection with what was known as the Great Educational Scheme of Napoleon Farrell.

Lying close to the inland shore of the lagoon were a number of ordinary rowing-boats of various sizes, and moored a short distance from the land lay a fair-sized steam launch.

A smudged-face man leaned over the bow, smoking a short pipe, and as the boat came in from the sea and slowly glided to the shore, he hailed the boys:

"Got a good mail, my lads?"

"A stiff one," answered Jim Gordon; "pecks of letters."

"If there are any with the r'yal coat-of-arms on the envelope," said the man, with a grin, "they are for me; or perhaps they may be directed to Rob Changeling, Esquire, without the family seal."

"All right," said Lal Brodie, "we'll see that you get all that are sent to you. Your correspondence generally isn't very heavy."

"Never had a letter in my life," sighed Rob Changeling, who was the engineer of the launch; "that's what makes me so sad." Here he grinned again. "I ain't got no friends to bother *me* with news, or to worrit me with asking for loans. Seen anything of anybody at sea?"

They told him of the attempt made by the stranger craft to run them down, and he looked more serious than he had hitherto done.

"Blowed if I don't think we shall have some bother with these Spanish warmints. When I last took Napoleon over to Minorca, one o' em comes up in a boat right to the side of the launch. I was lolling over the side, as I am now—for I allus lolls when I gets the chance—and this chap takes out a knife and holds it up to me. 'It's a good knife,' I says, 'but I ain't a buyer to-day.' Then he says something in his native gibberish, makes a cross the air with the weppin, and goes ashore again. Shortly afterwards Napoleon comes aboard, looking a bit white about the gills, and he orders me to git up steam smart, and make for home."

"They don't like our being here," said Jim Gordon, as he gently grounded the "Swallow" on the sandy shore, "but then, they have to lump it, you know."

The boys got out and lifted the sacks of letters and papers from the boat. Lal Brodie and Stiffeach took one upon his shoulders and went off towards the school. Jim Gordon remained behind to complete the furling of the lateen sail and put the craft generally in order.

He was near enough to Rob Changeling to converse with him without raising his voice.

"Rob," he said, "would you think I am at all a funky fellow?"

"If I did, I should be a fool," grunted Rob.

"Well, then, I may admit to you that I am in a stew. There's mischief brewing, and Mr. Farrell ought to send Miss Eveline to Gibraltar, or right on to England, for a time."

"Why Miss Eveline," asked Rob, "more'n her mother?"

"I can't exactly tell you why I think so," said Jim, "but that is what is in my mind. In case of emergency, I suppose you could run the launch so far."

"Yes; she's got oil enough on board for the trip. That's the best of these yere new engines. Not wanting coal, the fuel storage is light."

"She may not be wanted for days or weeks," said Jim, as he rose up to go, "but you will keep her ready, won't you?"

"Certainly, if you wishes it. I take more count of you than all the rest, including Nap. I don't fancy he'll come out too strong in a time of emergency."

"And you won't talk about what I have been saying to you to anyone?"

"Not me. I have got a nateral gift of conversation"—here he grinned again—"but I don't go blabbing about."

Jim Gordon walked away towards the school with a thoughtful air. It was in the afternoon of the day, about half-past three o'clock. Ahead he could see his companions of the "Swallow" toiling along with the mail-bags upon their shoulders, but there was nobody else about.

As he drew near the buildings, he turned aside to a wooden hut of fair size, it may have been thirty feet square, standing clear of the rest. Into it Brodie and Stiff had by that time disappeared.

There was a window on that side of it, and under that the ordinary slit of a letter-box. Just below the roof was a long board, on which was the following inscription, "Fermentera Post Office."

Jim paused by the door, and looked along the line of buildings composing the schools and workshops.

From one there came the sound of blacksmiths' hammers, from another the harsh grating of a hand-saw, and from most of them the ring of young and cheery voices, some singing as they toiled.

At the far end on the left there was another detached erection, marked on the front "Laboratory."

Jim made a step as if he would have gone on to it, but changed his mind, and entered the post-office.

Inside was a double room, a partition dividing the floor in two. The first part bore a rugged resemblance to an ordinary stamp-office, and the inner one was marked "Private."

Jim could have raised the flap of a counter that was a part of the furniture of the place, but he preferred vaulting over it, which he did with scarce an effort.

As one who had a right there, or was expected, he opened the door of the inner compartment and went in.

Five people were there already busy emptying the letters from the bags and sorting them.

Brodie and Stiff we know. The others were the schoolmaster, his wife and daughter.

Mr. Napoleon Farrell was a little man, bearing without a doubt a strong physical resemblance to the great Napoleon. He increased it by wearing a frock-coat with broad lapels, always buttoned up, tight-fitting trousers, and Hessian boots.

Mrs. Farrell was a woman of forty or more, and she must at one time have been very pretty. But years had faded her a bit, and she was now, in a pleasant way, a mincing little creature who would fain be still considered young.

There was one great point in her character, not always to be found in married women: she had an entire and all-abiding faith in her husband.

It was not shared by all the community on the island, of which more anon; but she verily believed that if he tried, he could go forth and conquer the world.

Then there was Eveline, sixteen, and as sweet as ever a girl was at that age. Charming, unaffected, beaming with good-humour, and with a laughter-loving eye, which she cast on Jim as he came in.

He flashed back a look, but beyond that they exchanged no greeting. Jim raised his cap to Mr. Farrell.

"Well, Gordon," said Mr. Napoleon Farrell, "had a pleasant trip?"

"Yes, sir," answered Jim. He was relieved to find that his companions had given the schoolmaster no inkling of what had happened. "For a monthly boat in the pay of the Spanish Government, she was very punctual. We knocked about three or four hours before we came across her."

"I really can never understand," said Mrs. Farrell, "how it is you boys escape being upset in that cockleshell boat."

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Eveline, "as if Jim—I mean they—could be so stupid as to upset *any* boat."

"I look upon their going out and coming home safely," said Mrs. Farrell, "as a constantly recurring miracle. I am glad I have no son, for, of course, if I had, he would be as daring as his father, and keep me ever in the fidgets."

Mr. Farrell had never shown any striking gift for risking his life, but he folded his arms in the true Napoleonic style, and said gloomily:

"The great sorrow of my life is that I have no son to—to—follow in my footsteps. Eveline, you may proceed with the sorting, as the boys will be glad to have their letters as soon as possible."

Eveline, who had been exchanging a few words with Jim in an undertone, hastened to do the sorting, in which the boys assisted.

Among the contents of the sacks there were many newspapers for the schoolmaster and parcels for the boys. For half an hour the sorting went on, and then Eveline suddenly exclaimed:

"Oh! what a funny, cramped direction! A letter for you, papa. And with the Minorca post-mark, too. It must have been taken down to Gibraltar."

"From Minorca?" said Mr. Nap Farrell, in slightly tremulous tones.

"Who can it be from?" inquired Mrs. Farrell, endeavouring to get a peep at the direction as her husband took it from Eveline.

"Oh, it is nothing," said the schoolmaster, hurriedly. "Perhaps a bill for some small article I forgot to pay for. Hasten, Eveline. The mail is wonderfully heavy this month."

He put the letter into his pocket, and was so visibly perturbed that Jim could not help occasionally casting a sidelong, inquiring glance at him.

From matters already within his knowledge Jim feared that the letter from Minorca might be of serious import.

But he gained no information concerning it, for Mr. Napoleon Farrell, with his arms folded, gloomily paced the room as the sorting went on, occasionally pausing and taking up the attitude familiar to those who have seen the picture of "Napoleon at the door of his tent on the eve of Austerlitz."

By half-past four the letters were all sorted, and Mrs. Farrell pulled a rope hanging against the wall, and a bell hung outside clanged loudly.

A few moments elapsed, and then two youngsters appeared. They were the school postmen, to be entrusted with the delivery of letters to their respective owners.

They were given the letters only, the parcels being retained until called for in the evening, and Mr. Nap Farrell stole quietly away.

Jim had quite a little bundle of letters for himself, and he soon followed the schoolmaster, intent on finding a quiet corner where he could sit down and read those precious epistles from home.

The young postmen were delivering the letters at the doors of the workshops, by which their recipients eagerly crowded. Jim hastened in the direction of a path that led to the back of the buildings, where there were many snug little nooks in the wood and shrubbery between the school and the castle.

He walked up a path, worn by the many feet that had trodden there, intent upon getting to a seat he knew of, close to the very gates of the castle, but was suddenly pulled up by a groan.

It came from human lips, and if he was not mistaken, from no less a person than the schoolmaster, the mighty modern Napoleon himself.

Jim stopped short and waited until he heard the sound repeated, and tracing it to some bushes on his right, he crept up and peered through the laced foliage.

Beyond it was a small open space, with a broken stone fountain in the centre. Seated on the edge of it was Mr. Nap Farrell, with his head bowed between his hands. Nervously gripped by his fingers was a letter, and the envelope it had been taken from lay upon the ground.

Jim had good eyes, which enabled him to make out, just above the curiously cramped writing of the address, the Minorca post-mark.

CHAPTER III.

JIM GORDON SEES THE RED LIGHT GROW STRONGER, AND THEREFORE MORE THREATENING.—TEA-TIME.



IT was more than an ordinary shock to Jim Gordon to see the schoolmaster so palpably overcome with either grief or terror. It was not easy to tell which it was while his face was hidden from view.

A full minute elapsed ere he raised his head, and then Jim saw that it was the latter

emotion that troubled him most. Shivering, he unfolded and smoothed out the letter—it was in a crumpled condition—and once more read it through.

The communication must have been of a short nature, for it was soon scanned. Jim would have liked to ask him what it was about, but that he knew could not be done. Up to that time there was nothing confidential in the relations of master and pupil as far as they were individually concerned.

Presently Mr. Nap Farrell got upon his feet, and paced to and fro in the style of an ordinary man troubled by his affairs. All the Little Corporal element had vanished.

Eventually he turned towards Jim, with the evident intention of leaving his retreat, and the youngster, with a light footstep, sped up the narrow path, which, turning here and there, speedily hid him from view.

Climbing on for five minutes or so, he came to the deserted castle of Espelmador.

It was a grandly massive building of the type one sees in pictures of ancient Spain. These castles, though unoccupied in this more civilised time, were, in the days gone by, the homes of mighty men who ruled the country around them with a rod of iron, now and then supplemented with fire and sword.

And no doubt this particular stronghold had been at one time the retreat of some marauder, a pirate of the sea, perhaps, where he held high revel after one of his excursions in search of plunder.

The walls were of a very massive description, and towers round and square still reared their heads towards the clouds, hoary with age, and broken on the summit by the action of wind and storm.

To one of modern tastes the look of it was somewhat gloomy and forbidding. The only visible entrance from the level ground was by a gate that

could only be reached by crossing a strong stone bridge just wide enough for two men to pass abreast.

For under that bridge there was a moat of considerable depth, dug out of the solid rock. It was kept filled, more or less, by the draining of water from the higher land and woods in the rear, and a small channel on the right carried off the overflow, when there was any, down to the lower ground in the form of a small cascade.

The moat bordered the castle on three sides, and in the front the sterile rock gave little hold for tree or bush. Thus an open space of some twenty yards or so was there. But in the rear the sombre wood of pine grew almost to the very verge of the moat. And it extended far back into the heart of the island, rising and falling with the undulations of the ground.

In that wood, hidden away, the wild boar roamed in security, at intervals showing his brawny form in the region of the castle. There was a legend, too, among the boys that the wolf was no stranger there, but nothing certain was known on that point.

The castle was the declared limit of the peregrinations of the boys.

Jim Gordon sat down on the low parapet of the bridge, and, putting aside all thoughts concerning the schoolmaster for a spell, proceeded to read his letters from home.

They were not of a nature to concern the reader—at present, anyway—and we will skip the twenty minutes he devoted to the task. The letters read, he sat thinking for awhile, and then moved on to the gate of the castle, which stood open.

One hinge was gone, and the massive woodwork was propped against the wall. The interior was gloomy, for in the room just beyond there were no windows, and the huge doors on the opposite side were closed.

Jim carefully scanned the leaves and dust deposited by the wind in the doorway. The inspection appeared to be satisfactory, for he smiled, as he murmured:

“Neither man nor beast has entered here since yesterday.”

On the right of the room, where of old men doubtless were on guard night and day, was the entrance to a narrow, winding staircase. Jim crossed over to it and climbed the darkened way.

It wound about twenty times or more ere it brought him to the battlements, emerging from a tower that rose up thirty feet or more over his head.

But he was high enough to have a magnificent view of the land below and the distant sea.

At his feet were the schoolhouse and workshops, dwarfed to the eye. A little more ahead the lagoon glistened in the light of the departing sun, beyond it the flower-crowned natural rockery, and then to the horizon nothing but the sea.

Stay, though. What is that away to the east, stealing along the shore of the island? Surely it is the boat which attempted to run the "Swallow" down that afternoon.

Jim took a long, steady look at it, and although it was but a tiny toy to the eye, he became practically certain it was that parlor craft, and no other.

"If I knew what Nap's trouble is," he muttered, "something might be done. If there is serious trouble ahead our people ought to know of it. But it can hardly be. They would never dare—hang it! these Spanish devils dare anything where their pleasure or profit is concerned. Why, they could come here, murder the lot of us, empty the schoolhouse, and for two months not a word of it would be known at home. I am afraid that is the contingency Nap overlooked when he started this school. And," he added, slowly, "it is something our friends did not dream of when they consigned us to his care."

The clanging of a bell from below rose up to his ears, and he started from his somewhat dismal reverie. Giving himself a shake, he cast off the gloom of his brow and hurried down the stairs with the confident step of one who had travelled that dark road many times before.

"Work over for the day," he murmured as he reached the outer air, "tea in ten minutes. Now for a race against time."

With the apparent recklessness, and at the same time surefootedness, of the mountain goat, he dashed down the rugged path and appeared on the level, just as the last boy from the workshops entered the house.

Jim followed, pursuing his way down a long passage to the back of the house, where there was a huge lavatory.

It was one of three attached to the house, and it was filled with boys, mostly in white duck overalls, which they were removing prior to having a wash.

Some were black and grimy—these worked at the forge; others were cleaner, but carried signs of labour in a carpenter's shop, and two had their clothes bespattered with paint.

Jim Gordon was received hilariously, he being one of the favourites of the school.

"It's nice to be you, shirking work," said a good-humoured youngster, as he scrubbed his face with a towel; "taking pleasure-trips at sea while we poor wretches are earning our bread by the sweat of our brows."

"A lot you've earned this afternoon, Terry," said another. "Who put the lid of the box on the wrong side, and got the hinges and lock together?" grinned the boy.

"We all make mistakes, Felton," was the reply of Terry. "Who made a horseshoe with eight nail-holes?"

"How was I to know?" asked Felton. "Didn't——"

"Never mind your blunders," interposed Jim. "Terry, you will come up to the castle to-night."

"Anything up?" asked Terry.

"Well, that is what I want to see into. Pass the word for the meeting of the council."

He spoke in an undertone, so that he was not heard by the other boys, who were, for the most part, too busy preparing for tea to heed him.

Terry nodded, and Jim, after a hasty wash, adjourned to a long room where the boys had their meals.

It had four doors, opening on the four sides of the house. The boys were pouring in, and taking their seats at the various tables, each of which accommodated about thirty.

In a little while all were filled, save one at the far end, which would seat ten or so, and this remained empty until the masters of the school—four in number—had taken their seats. Two of the elder boys presided at tables, but neither the head schoolmaster nor his wife appeared.

Finally eight men marched in, and took their seats at the unoccupied table. These were the teachers of trades, and so on.

There was Martin the blacksmith, Sleeney the carpenter, Pastern the plumber, Waffle the bootmaker, and old Chorker, teacher to the boys how to sail a boat and swim.

These several men had certain characteristics, which will appear as we proceed with our narrative. Bob Changeling, already introduced to the reader, was of the party.

There were no women waiting, but three niggers attended to the wants of the boys. The men looked after themselves.

The trio of sable servants were named Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo. Their relation to each other was that of father, son, and grandson, and true to the creed of families, they were at war with each other from morning till night.

Romeo, the youngest, was between twenty and thirty, but it pleased his father and grandfather to still treat him as a child, which he naturally resented.

They wore suits of red-and-white striped linen, and carpet slippers. Indoors or out their heads were always bare.

Macbeth never did more than he could help. He bossed the other two.

"Golly, now, what you doing?" he howled, as Hamlet stopped to grin at one of the boyish jokes uttered at the table. "Hahn't you got no manners, listening to de demarks ob your betters?"

"Me not listening," mendaciously replied Hamlet.

"What you a-grinning for, den?" demanded Macbeth.

"Spect I got de conwulsers ob de muscles ob de countenance," said Hamlet. "You bet I not study anatlemy for nuffin."

"You study anatlemy?" said Macbeth, contemptuously. "Where dat boy Romeo, now?"

"Gone for more bren-butter. I 'spect he up to some trick, a-scraping de butter 'off for futur' consumptive or sumfin. Dat chile want correcting."

At that moment the "child" appeared in one of the doorways with a piled-up plate of bread-and-butter in each hand.

He was carrying them with all the care of a competitor in an egg-and-spoon race, with eyes intent upon the summit of each plate, which had a tendency to bend this way and that; but with a dexterous movement he managed to restore the requisite equilibrium, until he collided with his grandfather, who was watching his advance with a critical and scornful eye.

The result of the meeting was that both plates of bread-and-butter received a shock, and a greater portion of the contents were thrown upon the floor.

"Whar you comin' now?" demanded Macbeth.

"What you stand dere for, like a stuff owl?" said Romeo.

"Am dis de langwidge to redress to your senors?" asked Macbeth. "When I was a boy, if I said a word to de ole folks I got a spankin' dat bring de eyes right out of my head."

"De march of interlicks," said Romeo, busily picking up the bread-and-butter, "am ag'in' spankin'—dead. You jes' try it on me."

"Romeo," said Hamlet, remonstrating, "don't forget de grey hairs ob your grandfather. Suspect dem, if notin' else."

Romeo by this time had restored the bread-and-butter to the plates, and calmly placed the latter on the table.

"Dere am a gritty piece or two in de middle," he said to the boys, "but de res' am as sweet and clean as de milk in de cocoanut."

"For all that," said Jim Gordon, who was seated near the spot where the plates were put down, "you may take that lot away and bring us some more. Try that gritty lot in the kitchen."

"All right, Massa Gordin," said Romeo, cheerfully, "dere a lot more cut. I take dis back, and if I lib to get t'roo de job, I'll see dat my ole grandfader, hab de gritty bits. He use digified langwidge here, but in de kitchen de way he swear make all de wool of dis chile stan' out straight and waggle."

Romeo soon had some more bread-and-butter on the table, without putting it through the gritty ordeal, and in half an hour or so the meal was over.

At a signal from one of the masters all rose, and stood by their seats while grace was being said.

The moment it was spoken there was a rapid melting away of the occupants of the room—all but Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo, who remained to clear away, and afterwards to have their own private feast in the kitchen, for which Romeo had most undutifully provided the gritty bits of bread-and-butter for his aged grandfather.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COUNCIL OF TEN.



THE sun was low down in the heavens as Jim Gordon once more wended his way upwards in the direction of the castle.

Through Lawrence Terry, the young carpenter who put the lid on the box the hind part before, he had summoned what was known

in the school as the Council of Ten. It was not a secret body by any means, but a council chosen by the boys to look into matters, and arrange things in their interests.

They filled the post of monitors in our big public schools, but their more pressing daily duties were connected with the various workshops of which they were the head, outside the men who were employed to instruct them.

But, apart from this work, they took certain duties upon themselves, and for the proper arranging and carrying out of the same they often met in semi-secrecy, and the place of meeting was Espelmador Castle.

When Jim arrived he found the gate leading to the courtyard open, and a youth standing there on duty. He carried no more potent arm than a stout stick, but he looked like one who could use it, and use it well, on emergency.

His name was Tim Dawson, and he was attached to a small farm that lay immediately beyond the school on the eastern side, where there was a small, level, fertile tract of land.

"How many here, Tim?" asked Jim.

"All but you," was the reply. "They seem to think that something serious is pending. What's the trouble?"

"Our chief seems to have mixed himself up with some Spaniards in a disagreeable way," replied Jim, "but I can't give you the particulars."

He passed on through a courtyard, where the grass and small flowering plants grow in the intersections of the stones, and entered a door on the opposite side. This led him to a vast hall, empty of all things

animate and inanimate, which he crossed, and found his way to an inner room, called the council chamber.

Here the council had made provision for rugged comfort during their deliberations.

In the centre was a table, roughly made, as were the requisite number of chairs. These conveniences were the result of overtime labour of the amateur carpenters.

Probably, if they had been offered for sale in any auction-room in England, the bidding would have been very slow, and stopped at a very small sum per article, but they served the purpose of the youngsters, eight of whom were already seated.

They ranged in age from fourteen to seventeen, the eldest being Robert Morse, aged seventeen, a grave-faced lad, with an inborn love for the study of chemistry; and Sam Whiffer, who was in the tailor's shop, the youngest.

In addition to those already named, we may enumerate Adam Steene, carpenter; Joe Ganthon, painter and plumber; Nicodemus Hillyard, boot-maker; Dave Felton, the cornopean player, and conductor of the school band; also George Rainstone, whose occupation, apart from that of the school, was working in a vineyard.

Ten in all, including the sentinel. Jim advanced to the head of the table and took his seat in a chair that differed from the rest in the back being slightly higher.

There was no preternatural gravity exhibited by the councillors. Most of them were talking in a light-hearted manner until Jim was seated. Then they turned their faces to him and were silent.

"You may wonder at this summons," he said, "especially as we met only a few days ago, but matters of moment have arisen since then. The school is in danger."

He then went into the events of the day, describing the attempt to run the "Swallow" down, and the subsequent trouble which the letter with the Minorca postmark had brought the chief.

"Having told you this much," said Jim, in conclusion, "I shall be glad to learn from you if there is anything peculiar that has come under your notice."

They had all noticed the depression of Mr. Farrell for some time past, but had no theory concerning it that offered a likely solution of the matter.

"I don't think it is anything much," said Joe Ganthon; "Nap—his name notwithstanding—soon gets into a blue funk. Perhaps he hasn't paid the rent of the island, and the Spanish Government is threatening to put the bailiffs in."

"That's one of Joe's ideas," remarked Dave Felton. "He doesn't study the habits or history of a people. The Spaniards haven't any bailiffs. When they don't get their rights they put a dagger in, somewhere near the ribs."

"Seriously," said Jim, checking a tendency to make fun of the thing, "I am sure we are on the eve of stirring events. It can't be a question of rent, for you must all call to mind how this school was founded. It is the fad of Napoleon Farrell, and he is a rich man—rich enough, anyway, to pay the comparatively small sum demanded as rent for this, to the Spaniards, useless island. Besides, the school pays."

"How do you know that?" asked Robert Morse, who had a head for figures, and was the champion calculator of the school.

"It must," said Jim, "with the fees we pay—or our parents and friends pay—the low rents, cheapness of all necessities of life, and our own productions, it can do nothing but pay. No; it is something more serious than that which has upset Nap's equilibrium, and I think it has something to do with the people who formerly lived on this island."

"A good-for-nothing lot," said Adam Steene.

"All the more likely to give trouble," continued Jim. "They had a sort of chief of their clan, one Espardo Reonardo, who was barely twenty when he left, against his will, and must be a very young man still. This is only the fifth year of the school on the island."

"Where did he go to?" inquired George Rainstone.

"There is no record of it, that I know of," said Jim, "but if he went to Minorca, I believe that he is the cause of the trouble."

"In what way?"

"He is threatening Farrell to turn him out, which means the disruption of the school altogether. It can't be carried on at home on its present lines. Besides, it was established to take boys right away from home to make men of them, fit to cope with the world."

"See prospectus," suggested Terry.

"See what you like," retorted Jim. "It has done good to many of us. You were a very poor specimen of the young Britisher, Terry, when you first came here."

"Well, suppose this Espardo something——"

"Reonardo."

"Reonardo intends to try to turn Nap out, how will he set to work about it? It takes something to shift a dozen men and two hundred boys."

"There are ways of worrying a man that you may not dream of," said Morse, who had been listening attentively to Jim. "For instance, there is the use of dynamite."

"There spoke the chemist," said Ganthon. "Bob is always poking about in the laboratory, and, naturally, his mind goes on to blowing up things and people."

"The meanest man, if he is cruel and wicked enough," said Morse, quietly, "has now some very potent agents at his command. Not that I think so in this case. Now, take to-day. It is perfectly clear that an attempt to run down the 'Swallow' was made. They meant it, and had they succeeded, who would have known what had happened?"

"We ought to keep a lookout when the boats are at sea," said Whiffer.

"But we have not done so hitherto, and if the 'Swallow' had been sunk and all drowned, it would have been considered an accident. There would have been the usual talk of a Mediterranean white squall. The papers at home, if we sent it to them, would have published an account of it under the heading, 'Disastrous Affair off the Island of Fermentera'; and probably, if the editor had room, would give an account of the school and its management."

"It is doubtful," said Jim Gordon, "if they would have heard much of it. Nap doesn't care for too much publicity. He started this school by private circular, and he carries it on in the same way. There is a hazy notion among people that we are being educated abroad, but they don't go further than that."

"So many youngsters go abroad nowadays," remarked Dave Felton—"to Germany, or France, or further—that nothing is thought of it. I don't suppose that one out of twenty thousand of the people of Great Britain have the least knowledge of the existence of such a drum as ours."

"Our position is this," interposed Jim Gordon, "and I beg of you to bear it in mind. In case we are attacked or annoyed in any serious way, our own Government cannot interfere, because they have no jurisdiction here, and the Spanish Government will be slow to move. It has so many matters nearer the capital to look to. We shall have to defend ourselves—to circumvent the enemy."

"Unless we cut it and went home," suggested Sam Whiffer.

"Not so easy as you think," replied Morse. "The launch could not carry a third of us, let alone our traps and general property. Her tonnage——"

"Blow her tonnage!" said Terry.

"By all means, if you like," said Morse, composedly, "blow it sky-high—certainly."

"You would find the explosive," grinned Terry.

"I have it ready when wanted," said the undisturbed Morse.

"Where?"

"That is my affair. Do you think that I am such a fool as to keep in the house a compound that would lift this castle from its foundations—though there is not much of it—where little boys like you could find it and play yourselves out of this world into the next? Not I."

There was some laughter at Terry's expense, as Morse finished with a slight snort of contempt for youngsters of Terry's calibre. The object of these pungent remarks waxed indignant.

"I've heard a deal about your cleverness in making this and that out of nothing, Morse," he said; "but I shall believe it when I see it."

Morse said no more just then, and the consultation was resumed.

It was of rather a desultory nature, but a conclusion was come to that they ought to keep their eyes open for an enemy, and be prepared to defend themselves from attack.

"I reckon," said Jim, with a smile, "that the fellow I floored in the boat to-day with a stone won't forgive me in a hurry."

"Perhaps it was Espardo Reonardo?" suggested Whiffer.

"Not knowing him by sight, can't say," said Jim. "Well, boys, I thought I would call you together and tell you what had come under my notice. At present I do not think we need give the younger ones a scare, for, after all, it may end in smoke."

They agreed with him, and as the evening was now getting on, the meeting broke up.

They left the room, and by the gate received a report from Tim Dawson to the effect that nothing had been near to disturb him, but he fancied he heard voices somewhere low down to the left from the school, towards the sea.

"You all know how sound travels up here," he said; "and whoever it was might have been on the beach."

"The slope is a regular whispering-gallery," said Morse. "Maybe some of the boys are out bathing to-night."

CHAPTER V.

MORSE ENLIGHTENS TERRY.—MR. NAPOLEON FARRELL THINKS IT NECESSARY TO TAKE EXTRA PRECAUTIONS.



N leaving the castle, the boys fell into Indian file to cross the bridge, Morse and Terry being in the rear, and Terry absolutely last.

Morse hung back a bit, so that those in front got ahead, and went off down the path. Terry asked Morse to push on.

"I want to have a word with you, Terry," said Morse. "We were talking of explosives just now, and you questioned my statements."

"Some of them want a little salt," said Terry. "It

is all very well for you to talk of the power of this and that, but if we do not see it, how are we to believe?"

"You surely don't expect me to lift this castle in the air by way of proof?"

"If you don't mean to do it, you had better not talk about the possibility of its being done."

"See here," said Morse, producing a pill-box from his pocket. He carefully took off the lid, disclosing a small quantity of white powder at the bottom. "You see this?"

"Yes—looks like a teething-powder," replied Terry.

"Here is a flat stone," continued Morse, composedly, "on which I place one grain of powder. You can scarcely see it. Now take this other stone and give it a smart tap."

Morse closed up his pill-box and withdrew to a short distance, as Terry, with a grin, and the stone in his hand, bending over the grain of powder, gave it a smartish tap.

Bang!

It went off like a small gun, and Terry in his fright skipped and fell into a sitting position.

"I have at various times made and stored away about half a pound of that stuff," said Morse, serenely. "What do you think of it?"

"Hang it!" said Terry, as he rose from the ground. "you don't mean to say that it is your own invention?"

"Yes and no," answered Morse. "I call it improved melinite, and the improvement on the original article is mine."

"Does Nap know you make such stuff as that?" inquired Terry, as they set off down the path.

"No, nor anybody else but you. Don't talk about it."

A short distance down they found the others waiting for them. Jim asked them what they had been firing off.

"Some of his precious inventions," said Terry, making a wry face—"a sort of powder. There was not so much as you can put in a thimble."

This was true, and he concealed the truth with regard to the smallness of the quantity used.

"It made a precious row, anyway," said Tim Dawson.

The sun was now low down in the west, and when they reached the level it was lost behind the line of rocks on the other side of the lagoon. The sky was a brilliant hue, golden towards the sun, shading off to the richest of French greys in the east, and there was not a cloud in the sky.

Mrs. Farrell and Eveline sat by the porch of the schoolhouse, engaged in light needlework. In the distance the men instructors of the boys were playing quoits, and the shore of the lagoon was lively with the

boys lying about, strolling up and down, or skylarking.

On the whole there rested the sweetest of twilight halos, and the beauty of the scene impressed itself on several of the Council of Ten, especially on Jim as he looked at Eveline.

Round her golden hair there seemed to be a halo of light, but that may have been his fancy. It reminded him, however, of some pictures he had seen, painted by the old masters. There was assuredly, at the moment, something more than earthly in her youth and beauty.

"The most peaceful scene on earth," said Ganthony, looking round him, "on my word. What a contrast it is to some of the stifling places at home! Think of the East-end of London and this spot."

"Where is our Nap?" asked Morse; "he is usually sitting like a patriarch in his porch, surveying his flocks and herds of men and boys."

"He is just coming out of the house with Martin," said Steene.

It was so. Pale and with restless eyes, the head of the place emerged from his house in company with Martin, the blacksmith.

They passed near enough to the boys for them to overhear what he was saying. "Let the bolts be as strong as you can make them, and if possible, I should like to have them fixed before to-morrow night."

"Very good, sir."

Martin turned away and bent his footsteps in the direction of the quoit-players. Mr. Farrell sauntered back to his wife and daughter.

"Where are those negroes?" he inquired. "I do not see them about anywhere."

"They asked for permission to go to Silver Bay to bathe, and I gave it them," Mrs. Farrell said.

"They said they would be back by sunset," remarked Eveline.

The boys could not linger longer, and passing on towards the lagoon, heard no more. Beyond the orders for the iron bars there was nothing of importance in what they heard. But that struck Jim Gordon as being another link in the mystery of impending trouble.

He did not linger by the lagoon, but wandered on to the spot where the men were playing.

He soon got an opportunity to speak to Martin, who stood near the quoit-players, looking on.

"To-morrow afternoon," he said, "I shall be glad to take a turn at the forge, unless you have some work on that is beyond me."

"I wish you would come altogether," said Martin, looking at him with an approving eye. "You are just the sort of lad who was made for the forge and hammer."

"I heard Mr. Farrell speaking about some iron bars," said Jim, modestly ignoring the compliment.

"Yes, he wants a lot. Old Nap seems to have got into a nervous state about something."

"You have no idea what it is?"

"No more than the man in the moon, who doesn't know much, I reckon."

"Well, he wants a lot of bars?"

"Yes, for both doors and windows, and some especially strong ones for Miss Eveline's room."

Jim's face flushed rosy red for a moment, and the colour dying away, left him pale.

"Why her room more than the rest?" he asked, in a low voice.

"I haven't the least idea, but he is a man of fads. He is also as nervous as a kitten when the least thing goes wrong."

A dispute in the game now took place. An outside umpire was wanted to decide a knotty question, and Martin was called to the office. Jim Gordon walked away, and seeing Morse seated apart from the rest of the noisy youngsters, went up to him. The young chemist, born to that line of study, was busy making some deep calculations on a piece of paper. He did not hear the footsteps of Jim, who stood behind him quietly, and said nothing until he had apparently got through his task.

"Morse," he said.

The other looked up startled, but seeing who it was, smiled. Jim sat down beside him.

"I have got another bit of evidence," he said, "to lead us to a knowledge of what is the matter."

He told Morse about the bars of extra strength for Eveline's room—or rather rooms, for she had two, one serving for sleeping and the other as a studio and boudoir in one. Eveline painted in water and oils remarkably well for one so young and comparatively untutored.

"I think," said Morse, after he had thought over the communication, "that Nap is threatened with an invasion of the original owners of the island. It is only natural that a father should take precautions for his only daughter, and"—with a glance at Jim—"one so remarkably pretty."

"As her mother was before her," said Jim.

"But her mother has not her brains. In that respect Eveline is a decided improvement on the original article."

"You are all for brains," said Jim.

"I believe in them," replied Morse.

"And I am an advocate for muscle," said Jim, doubling his arm so as to make the most of the biceps that stood up under the sleeve of his jacket like a small cocoanut.

Robert Morse laid his fingers on the upper part of Jim's arm, and critically examined its condition.

"I think," he said, "that you grow taller and stronger every day."

"I am getting on," returned Jim, laughing.

"Together," said Morse, dreamily, "you and I ought to do something. I can devise and you can execute. Not but what I could help you in the active part at a pinch, for I am not a chicken."

"You are a good average specimen of boys of your age," answered Jim. "I imagine you have a very clever father."

"Not a bit of it. He is one of the simplest men going. His chief hobby is gardening, and even in that he has to trust to books to do the right thing."

"A clever mother, then?"

"No; good, but not clever."

"Where did you get your head from, then?"

Morse laughed, and glanced towards the rippling sea, now without glint of sunshine, and getting dark on the horizon.

"You ask me a problem," he said, "I should very much like to work out. Where does anything come from? All round us is a problem. And perhaps it is better so. For, suppose we knew everything, how miserable we should be! There would absolutely be nothing to live for."

"You are altogether too deep for me, Bob," said Jim, "but you are a good fellow, and I think we like each other."

"Jim, I have no brother except you."

"And you are my only one, Bob. I like a good many fellows here, but the feeling I have for them is different from that I have for you."

"Same here, old fellow. Now, what do you think I have been calculating?"

"Goodness and yourself alone know."

"I have been estimating how much of the explosive I have invented—it is an improvement on melenite—it would take to blow away yonder line of rocks and throw the lagoon open to the sea. It would then become a small but very useful harbour."

"Well, I'll be bothered!" exclaimed Jim, breathlessly. "What next will you get into that cranium of yours?"

"The thing I lack," said Morse, "is a knowledge of sapper-work. If ever I get that—and I mean to study it—I could with a few men manage the job."

He dived his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat and brought out a small book.

"Now here," he went on, "I have a small compact work on earth fortifications, with maps and plans in outline. Now, suppose we had need to defend this place."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Jim, eagerly, "suppose we had such need"

"Where would you build a fort?"

"Why, in front of the house, of course."

"Then you would be wrong. It would have to be erected on the slope behind it. Or two or three would be necessary, perhaps. One over on that knoll there, close to the castle-path, and another away to the right where that flat rock juts out. We could also have one hidden away in the shrubbery, to be unmasked when the enemy gets near it."

Jim's face was flushed and very eager now. Hitherto he had devoted most of his superfluous energy and leisure time to the sea, but here was a thing—the building of a fort and erection of earthworks—that came home to him as his proper avocation.

"This a crude plan of Portsmouth and its surrounding country," continued Morse. "Here are the forts built out between the mainland and the Isle of Wight—once thought much of, but not so now, I fancy; here are the old forts on the seashore—entirely useless; but here, inland, on the slopes are the earthworks and bomb-proof casemates, and what not, which I am certain an enemy would have to reckon with to his cost."

"I see," said Jim, musing, as he ran his finger over the map, "the guns of our time carry to such an immense distance that while we hold these earthworks no enemy could occupy the town."

"Just so," said Morse; "that is what the book says, and it carries conviction in every word. So it would be with the schoolhouse and buildings. If we had forts where I have pointed out, no living person could stay in them for an hour."

"But we have no guns," said Jim, lugubriously.

"Well, we have no use for them. Who is likely to lay siege to us seriously? And don't forget," added Morse, "that we have two hundred Enfield rifles which we are drilled with. It is true they are of a discarded pattern, but at a pinch would be very useful. Nap got them cheap, but they might prove very dear to a foe in the hands of anyone capable of handling them."

"But we have no cartridges," said Jim.

"We could make them. I am sure that I could knock up a cartridge on the old pattern that would serve, and I know the component parts of gunpowder. The Enfields are the old muzzle-loaders which were served out to the volunteers in eighteen-sixty. We have thousands of guncaps which Nap allows us to use when drilling. But what are we talking of, Jim? There isn't much prospect of our having to fight, is there?"

"I don't know," replied Jim; "but I am dead sure that it will be great fun to build up earthworks, and *sham* getting ready for a foe. I think I will speak to Nap about it to-morrow."

Darkness was now falling rapidly upon the earth, and the *réveille* was sounded from the front of the house by a young drummer attached to the school band.

The sharp rattling of the kettle-drum echoed up the hills, and in a hundred nooks and crannies, and floated away out to sea.

Jim had heard it a hundred times before, and in the same place, but it had never hitherto inspired him with such intense emotion as it did that night.

As he walked towards the house beside Morse he was as one enthralled by the sounds of distant but unseen warfare.

The boom of the cannon, the rush of many feet, the thud of horses' hoofs, fierce cries of defiance, and the yells of the wounded sounded in a dumb way in his ears. He was as one on whom a mighty inspiration is dawning, but he made no attempt to speak of it to his companion, for he would never have been able to explain his novel emotion.

It was altogether inexplicable. It was as a sudden rising and surging of a hitherto unknown sea within his breast.

The *réveille* ceased, and the feeling and the vision vanished. A profuse perspiration burst out upon his brow.

"I have often wondered," he thought, "how a soldier feels on the eve of a great battle. Now I think I know." Then he entered the house in the rear of the stream of chattering boys, and, in the glare of lamps and the rattle of the indoor ordinary life, returned to ordinary thoughts and ways.

One thing he observed, however, in connection with his recent emotion, and that was it made him more hungry than usual, as if he had taken more than ordinary exercise. Supper had never been more welcome to his healthy organisation.

CHAPTER VI.

MACBETH AND HIS DESCENDANTS GET INTO TROUBLE.



"Y dear Nap, said Mrs. Farrell opening the door of her husband's study and popping her head in, "those wretched negroes have not returned, and the boys are waiting on themselves."

Mr. Farrell, who was sitting in a dejected attitude, with his head resting on his hand,

looked up wearily.

"You ought not to have allowed them to go," he said.

"My dear," urged Mrs. Farrell, "all people, and especially negroes, must wash occasionally."

"They ought to have been sent one at a time," said the schoolmaster, testily; "at home they don't agree,

and here some restriction is put upon them. Abroad they have free play, and the probabilities are that they have been fighting, and destroyed each other like a trio of Kilkenny cats."

"How absurd you are, Nap!"

"I don't feel so. Where is Eveline?"

"Arranging her painting materials for an outing to-morrow."

"She can't go," hastily exclaimed the schoolmaster.

"Why not?" asked his surprised wife.

"I don't think it is quite safe—that is—I believe the weather—I—I don't wish her to go."

"Nap," said Mrs. Farrell, coming into the room and putting her arms around his neck, "you are not well. You must have a dose of salts and senna, the great remedy of my dear mother."

"Your dear mother," said Mr. Farrell, "hadn't an idea beyond salts and senna. She was, if you will allow me to say so, a bit of——"

Whatever he was about to say concerning the true condition of his mother-in-law was never uttered, for a clamouring and a wailing of the most unearthly description, in the passage outside the room, cut him short.

If a dozen dogs had been uttering vocal objections to being tied up in a strange place, the noise could not have been more harrowing.

"Goodness graciousness!" exclaimed Mrs. Farrell, horrified, "what is that?"

"I think it is those accursed niggers," replied Mr. Farrell, recovering from an intense but momentary shock. "Here! hi! stop that row, will you?"

He plunged out of the room and soon received verification of his belief in the authorship of the disturbance, in the persons of Macbeth and Hamlet.

They were standing a short distance from the door of the study, with their hands clasped, their eyes tightly shut, and their capacious mouths open to their fullest extent.

"Ow-ow—eeeo—eeeo!" they howled. "Eeeo—eeeo—ow-ow!"

"Stop it, will you!" roared the schoolmaster, plunging towards them. "What is it all about? You are disturbing the whole house!"

Doors were opening, and there was a sound of feet coming towards them. The study, let it be mentioned, was on the ground-floor at the back of the house.

One of the first to appear was Eveline, and close behind her were Jim Gordon and a host of the boys. They stopped short on seeing that nobody was being tortured to death, as was generally imagined. Eveline slowly glided up to her amazed mother's side.

"What is the matter, you accursed wretches?" demanded the half-maddened schoolmaster. "How dare you make such a riot here?"

"Massa," said Macbeth, "we was a-wailing for de dead."

This startling statement caused Mr. Farrell, the Napoleon of Fermentera, to start violently and turn pale. Mrs. Farrell uttered a little scream, and the boys drew up nearer.

"Who-o-oo's dead?" asked Mr. Farrell.

"De boy Romeo," replied Macbeth, "de pride and de apple ob him grandfader's eye."

"You neber more kind to him dan you was 'bliged to be," sobbed Hamlet, "you regular violent old cuss. You make de chile's life a misery."

"Will—you—kindly—explain—yourselves?" said the goaded schoolmaster. "One of you tell exactly what has happened. Now, Macbeth, let us have it from you."

"We tree," began Macbeth, "started for to bathe full ob famly lub——"

"Gorlemighter!" interrupted Hamlet. "Full ob lub, and him a-worritting dat poor boy to griddlestrings!"

"Don't interrupt!" fiercely exclaimed Mr. Farrell.

"Nap, dear," interposed his wife, "do not get so excited. You will only make yourself ill."

A gesture from the schoolmaster bade Macbeth go on.

"Somehow," continued the aged nigger, "afore we get to de sea, de harmoly ob de ebening was interrupted by pussonal remarks, which injuced de poor boy Romeo to say dat he see us all blowed afore he bathe within 'arf a mile ob us. 'Cordingly he took hisself orf to de outside ob Silber Bay behind de rocks, where he could reform him ablusuns whar we not see him. Den we hab de usual dip in de sea, and sit down to wait for de boy. Finding he not come at a 'spectable interbal, we go to see if he was ready."

"And you wif a knotted hanchercher to spank him wif," remarked Hamlet. "Ow-ow!"

"But he not dere," continued Macbeth, with a howl, "nuffin but him clothes. Oh! whar am de apple ob my eye?"

"The poor fellow is drowned!" exclaimed Mr. Farrell.

"Not him," said Macbeth. "Massa, he swim better dan most fish."

He further explained that they had been seeking Romeo high and low, calling to him in vain, and finally they had returned home with his clothes as a sad memento of their loss.

The two negroes leant against the wall, quietly sobbing, while the schoolmaster and some of the boys hurriedly consulted as to what ought to be done.

There was a suggestion of sharks from Mrs. Farrell, but it was not accepted as a solution of the mystery. No shark had ever, to their knowledge, been seen or heard of in that region of the sea.

But a suggestion from Morse was more acceptable.

"It may be an octopus," he said. "I saw some of its spawn about a few days ago."

Anyway, nothing could be done that night. The boys went back to their supper, and Mr. Farrell, with his wife and Eveline, returned to the study.

They were all intensely sorry that anything should have happened to "the boy Romeo," as he was the favourite nigger of the three; although it must be confessed he was a long way the idlest, which is saying a great deal.

Macbeth and Hamlet, still overwhelmed with grief, wended their way to the kitchen, where, behind its closed door, they fell into each other's arms, and sobbed and wailed most dismally.

"It 'bout a judgment, dat what it are," wailed Macbeth. "You uncommon hard on dat boy, to be sure."

"Me hard?" exclaimed Hamlet, stepping back from his father and regarding him with angry scorn. "I parse de mose ob my time intelvening twix him and you. All de day long you was down on my incensed offspring."

There was a door at the back of the kitchen leading to a scullery, beyond which was the outer air. It now opened, and a dark face was thrust cautiously in.

Unseen, two huge ears drank in the further reproaches of the elder niggers.

They laid it on each other pretty thickly for a time, but Macbeth, turning to put more than usual emphasis upon some remark, espied the listening head, and plunging forward, laid hold of an ample ear.

"Come in," he cried, "you inkgrate, you trouble-some little varmint! What you been doing wif yourself?"

"Whar my clothes?" roared Romeo. "Am dis decent? S'pose missus come inter de kitchen wif me in nuffin but bathin'-drawers?"

"Missus neber come here in de ebening," said Macbeth, "and you know it. Dere you clothes; put 'em on."

This was soon done, and Romeo sat down on a chair, looking very dogged.

"Now, whar you been?" demanded his father, giving him a cuff on the side of his head.

"Nowhar," answered Romeo.

This was such an obvious lie, and withal so exasperating, that they both went for him, administering a remonstrance apiece in the form of a sounding thwack on the head.

They might as well have assaulted a block of wood.

"You been nowhar!" hissed Macbeth. "What you mean by dat reversion ob de trufe?"

"Mean what I say," replied Romeo.

He dug his hands into his pockets, thrust his feet out, and looked as dogged as you please as he made this mendacious assertion.

"If you been nowhar," said Macbeth, "whar was you?"

"Whar I sat down—jest whar my clothes was. 'Spect I fell asleep."

Hamlet exchanged glances with his father. Both seemed to be getting into a state of hopeless bewilderment. It was some moments ere they could return to the charge.

"Yer mean ter say," said Hamlet, taking up the thread of expostulation, "that you was sitting thar and we not see you?"

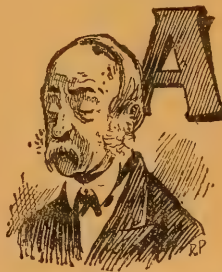
"Yes," replied Romeo, "dat 'bout it."

And he stuck to his text, not only then but later on when Mr. Farrell took him in hand. He went further with the schoolmaster, boldly hinting that the whole thing was a joke on the part of his unworthy father and grandfather to get him into trouble.

There was no going beyond this. It was impossible to tell who had spoken the truth. To some it did not seem to matter, but Jim Gordon, thinking it over after a private talk with Romeo on the following morning, came to the conclusion that there was something more to tell, if Romeo could be induced to tell it.

CHAPTER VII.

DISAPPEARANCE OF ONE OF THE UNDER-MASTERS.



AMONG the under-masters engaged at the school was one of the name of Stephen Stebbing, a silent, thoughtful kind of man, well advanced in years.

It was his custom, when the weather permitted—and it was rare for it not to permit—for him to rise early, sometimes before the sun showed above the horizon, and wander about the island. Sometimes he went along the shore, but as often as not he was known to make excursions inland.

On the following morning it was assumed that he had risen according to his habit, and gone forth on one of these lonely outings, but, contrary to his wont, had not returned when the breakfast-bell sounded.

Nor was he at his place at the table over which he presided—it was that at which Jim Gordon and Morse and a score of others sat—and then some inquiries were made concerning him.

Old Chorker was consulted, he being a professed early riser, but nothing decided could be obtained from him.

"I see Mr. Stebbing a-standing agin the front door about five, I reckon, but I didn't take no heed on him.

I turns my head away, and when I looked again he had vanished."

Jim Gordon took the head of the table temporarily, as it was believed, for the assumption was that the under-master was simply later than usual. But the breakfast was finished without his putting in an appearance.

Then Mr. Groby, the mathematical master, went to see Mr. Napoleon Farrell, who was partaking of the morning meal in the society of his wife and daughter. The absence was mentioned, and it had a most extraordinary effect on the schoolmaster.

He threw up his arms and, uttering a groan, sank back in his chair.

But he was not in a faint, and when his alarmed wife and Eveline rushed to his side, he pushed them gently away, saying, "It is nothing. I am all right. Stebbing gone, you say?"

"Yes, sir," replied Groby, "gone out. He went early this morning and has not returned. Our opinion is that he has met with some accident, slipped from a rock and sprained his ankle, or something of that sort."

"The work has begun," moaned the schoolmaster; "you will never see him more alive."

"What work, sir?" exclaimed the surprised under-master, "no more alive? Why not?"

"I spoke hastily," said Mr. Farrell; "this is not the place to talk about such matters. I will see you later on, Mr. Groby."

"Meanwhile," suggested the mathematical master, "would it not be as well for some search to be made for him? Stebbing has never been late before. He is the most punctual of men."

"There is no occasion to go yet," said Mr. Farrell, with bloodless lips; "perhaps he will soon return."

This was in such direct contradiction to his recent declaration, that the listeners were more and more surprised.

"Your papa is not well," said Mrs. Farrell to Eveline; "he really must have some medicine."

Eveline was looking intently at her father. She was very young, but in many things much shrewder than her mother. She saw that there was something more than bodily illness in the demeanour of her parent.

"It is no use worrying papa now," she said. "Mr. Groby, will you come again in half an hour?"

"The morning work will have begun by that time," he said.

"Well, later on, some other time," said Eveline.

The under-master left the room, and Eveline dismissed her mother for smelling-salts, merely to get rid of her for awhile.

It was one of the peculiarities of Mrs. Farrell that she mislaid everything, and never could, without a long search, find anything required.

"Now, dear," said Eveline, laying her head upon her father's shoulder, "tell me what it is all about."

"I don't understand you," he said, feebly.

"Oh, yes, you do," said Eveline, confidently, "you know that there is something troubling you. What is it?"

He braced himself up in an effort to be firm, and succeeded to an extent.

"My dear child," he said, "it is a matter I cannot talk to you about, but I will take this opportunity to tell you that I have been thinking of embracing the first chance of sending you to England."

"What for?"

"To—to complete your education."

"Oh, no," said Eveline, serenely, "that is not the reason. I want no more boarding-school education. But I see that it is something which concerns me that is troubling you."

He kissed her fondly, and told her not to ask any more questions. It was his wish she should go to England for a time, and he would say no more.

"I won't go," said Eveline.

"But you must, my dear," he urged.

"I won't, and there's an end of it—not unless you go. I am very happy here with you and mamma, and the—the boys. Not," she added, quickly, "that the boys count for much, but they make the place lively. Then look at the splendid opportunities I have for sketching. I am going up to the castle this morning to paint it from the north-east."

"I can't let you go," said the schoolmaster—"not without an escort."

"Well, let Romeo go with me, if you are nervous, and one of the boys. There is Gordon. He idles about a great deal. Give him some real work to do."

It was a bold proposition, and she never for a moment expected her father would fall in with it; but he did so.

"Gordon is no boy for books," he said. "He was born for an open-air life. He shall go with you and Romeo. When will you be read to start?"

"At once," said Eveline, with the light of pleasure dancing in her eyes. "You need not worry mamma about my having an escort. She is so nervous about nothing."

"I would go with you myself," said the schoolmaster, hesitating, "but——"

"My dear papa," said Eveline, ingenuously, "it would be such a pity to take you from your duties. I really could not think of it. Gordon, with Romeo, will be sufficient—that is, if Gordon cares to come."

"I will ask him," said Mr. Farrell, "and do not anticipate a refusal; he is such an obliging boy. Romeo, of course, has to do as he is told."

"He is very obedient," said Eveline, sweetly.

The boys were being summoned to their morning

studies when Mr. Farrell went in search of Jim Gordon. He found him sauntering towards the class-rooms—there were several—with Hillyard. Beckoning him aside, he said :

"Gordon, I wish you to give up school for this morning and act as escort to my daughter. She is going on one of her painting excursions, and I do not like her being alone."

Jim's eyes grew dim with delight. This was an unlooked-for, undreamt-of proposition; but it was slightly damped by the further information that Romeo would be one of the party also.

Jim, on the whole, kept his countenance wonderfully well. He expressed his willingness to accompany "Miss Eveline," and see that she came to no harm.

"Come into my study for a few moments," abruptly said Mr. Farrell.

Jim accompanied him thither, the schoolmaster carefully closing the door.

"Gordon," he said, "you are a bold, cool-headed boy, they tell me. Now, if a wild beast attacked my daughter, would you defend her?"

"With my life," said Jim, simply.

"Or if some stray ruffian annoyed her——"

"I would shoot him dead," said Jim.

Mr. Farrell opened a drawer and took out a six-chambered revolver.

"If I trust you with this," he said, "you won't get up to any boyish tricks with it?"

"No, sir. If I do anything with it, it will be something in earnest."

"Then take it," said the schoolmaster, putting it into his hand. "Use it if necessary. I shall expect Eveline back to dinner"

"Very good, sir."

Jim left the study, and if he had ventured on giving way to his feelings he would have danced a hornpipe in the passage. But, adopting a more prudent course, he simply went outside and waited for Eveline and Romeo. The latter was at liberty to stay at home if he pleased.

The young people could have got on very well without him, but there was yet another person who could have been dispensed with, and that was Mrs. Farrell, who, much to Jim's disgust, unexpectedly appeared with Eveline.

Romeo, in attendance, carried the painting materials and a shawl and camp-stool for Mrs. Farrell. Jim took possession of one for Eveline. Together they ascended the path leading to the castle, Romeo bringing up the rear, and signalling his progress by dropping the various articles entrusted to him, in turn or all together, until Mrs. Farrell wrathfully bade him go in front so that she could keep her eye upon him.

While keeping her eye upon him she could do little

else, and Jim and Eveline were practically alone during the ascent. They conversed in whispers; therefore, what they said being evidently a secret, we are not at liberty to record it.

Jim, while speaking, looked somewhat anxious, but Eveline was in high spirits, smiling, and looking very happy indeed.

The point selected by her to sketch the castle from was reached, the easel was fixed, and Eveline set to work. Jim remained in attendance upon her, Mrs. Farrell sat down a short distance away with a book, and Romeo was directed to use her fan to keep away the flies, which were both numerous and troublesome. He set to work, but as his attention wandered towards the young people, he misdirected his efforts, and knocked the bonnet of Mrs. Farrell awry. Having performed this feat twice, he was sternly told to give up the fan and accompany his mistress, who, finding reading in comfort an impossibility, rose from her seat.

"I think, Eveline dear, she said, "that I will go fern-hunting. There ought to be some rare specimens in the shady corners of the wood."

"Do not venture in too far," advised Jim, "in case you should lose yourself."

"I will take Romeo with me," said Mrs. Farrell.

No objection was raised to this proposal, and with that erratic sable attendant she disappeared.

For a time Eveline went on painting in silence, but presently she looked up.

"How quiet you are to-day!" she said.

"I feel so," replied Jim. "Eveline, I know you are a plucky little thing——"

"Thank you, I am sure," said Eveline.

"It is not as a mere compliment I say this," continued Jim, "but because I know it is true, and because I feel certain you will ere long have need of all your nerve. Why am I here to day?"

"I am sure I don't know," replied Eveline, demurely.

"Of course, if you do not care to remain——"

"Eveline, at another time I might be less solemn than I am now, but I must be serious. I am here because there is need of your being protected."

She looked up quickly, and saw by his face that he meant all he said. A slight shade of apprehension passed over her own.

"Whom or what have I to fear?" she asked.

"I can only guess at present," said Jim; "but it is certain that there is danger in the air. Have you noticed the change in Mr. Farrell?"

"He is not himself," said Eveline, as she thoughtfully put in some of the shadows in her sketch. "I have observed——"

She stopped short, checked by a terrific scream, and in it she recognised her mother's voice. Mrs. Farrell was a little woman, but she was endowed with

extraordinary vocal powers. The sound came from the direction of the wood.

The young people looked at each other, and Jim thrust his hand into the pocket where he had placed the revolver.

And now another sound was heard, a roaring of one who is overcome with grief, a magnified form of blubbering, and Romeo came tumbling down from the direction of the wood, with his eyes out of his head, and exhibiting a sensible stiffening of his wool.

"Loramassy on all ob us!" he cried. "Missus done for. She 'bout as dead as a stone!"

A cry of alarm burst from the lips of Eveline; but Jim motioned for her to restrain her emotion for the moment. He had a better idea of the true nature of such a communication from Romeo.

"Show me where she is," he said. "Eveline, I think you had better come too. Now," he added, sternly, to Romeo, as they moved upwards towards the wood, "tell me exactly what has happened."

"Nuffin happen dat I see, sar," replied Romeo, "but missus go inter de wood and me foller at a 'speckful distance, so dat I lose sight ob her. Den me see a big fly a-brushing him wings on de trunk ob a tree, and me go for to squash him, when jes' as I was on de p'int ob gibbing him a bang, me hear a scream, and I knowed de voice ob missus."

Romeo stopped to wipe the perspiration from off his brow. Jim impatiently bade him move quicker, and finish his story.

"Hearin' de voice," resumed Romeo, "me stopped to deflect on what was de matter, and de seclusion me come to was dat suffin' had scared her. Den me went on to de spot, and dere she lay dead as a stone, and deader."

"And what did you do then?"

"Nuffin', but run to you and Miss Eveline with inflammation ob de capastafer."

"Show me exactly where she is," said Jim, angrily. "Mrs. Farrell is of a nervous, sensitive disposition, and it may be nothing but a simple fright, followed by fainting."

"You think not, Jim," murmured Eveline, trembling. She was more concerned for her mother than she would have been on her own behalf.

"Don't worry, Evey," said Jim, softly.

"Here de spot!" cried Romeo; "and loramassy, if missus ain't acomin' roun'!"

Mrs. Farrell had indeed struggled into a sitting position, not being after all quite so dead as Romeo announced her to be. She was staring wildly about her. On seeing Jim Gordon she uttered a cry of delight.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come," she said, tearfully; "and Eveline, too. I have had such a scare. Where is that abominable Romeo?"

Romeo, who had taken refuge behind a tree,

evidently conscious that he had been remiss in his duties, humbly announced his presence.

"You wretched creature!" cried Mrs. Farrell. "What do you mean by deserting me as you did?"

"Me had a attack ob fainting, too, missus," said Romeo, in whom the truth did not dwell, "and de moment me come roun' I foller up and—and save your life."

Mrs. Farrell aimed a blow at him with her sunshade, which he easily dodged. Jim, anxious to get at the cause of the commotion, asked Mrs. Farrell what had originally alarmed her.

"I was walking quietly along," she said, "looking for ferns, when I came to some bushes—there is the clump—and as I got near it a face popped out."

"A face?" exclaimed Eveline.

"A face, my dear, not exactly ugly, but still a hideous face, that glared at me with the malevolence of a tiger. Then I screamed, and fainted away."

"And you know nothing more, mamma?" said Eveline.

"Nothing more, my child," was the answer, "and I think it is quite enough."

Jim walked over to the bushes, a very thick group of some flowering shrub. The ground around was dry, but under the bushes, in the thick of the group, the soil was moist and covered with rotting leaves.

On his inspecting it, signs of recent footsteps were visible, and close to where Mrs. Farrell had seen the face were two indentations, bowl-shaped, which might reasonably be assumed to have been made by a kneeling man.

He had a strong aversion to telling a lie, but in this case he thought it advisable to conceal the truth.

Returning to the group, Jim calmly gave his opinion that Mrs. Farrell must have been victimised by a vision—"created by her vivid imagination."

"Were you thinking of anything particular at the time?" he inquired.

"Well, yes, I was," said Mrs. Farrell. "My mind was dwelling on a story I have recently been reading, about Spanish brigands—"

"Ah!" said Jim, gaily, "that accounts for it. But you had better give up fern-hunting for to-day, at least, and come back with us."

"I shall sketch no more to-day," said Eveline, looking steadily at Jim. "I have the outline done, and can finish the rest at home."

There was no anxiety on the part of any there to remain, and they left the wood. Jim Gordon kept his hand carelessly in his pocket, where it rested on the handle of the revolver with which Mr. Nap Farrell had entrusted him. Mrs. Farrell showed she was in a hurry to get out of the wood by nervously hurrying on.

"For all you say," she remarked to Jim, "I don't think it was fancy."

"Who can there be on the island but ourselves?" asked Jim.

As he put the question to Mrs. Farrell he cast a covert glance at Romeo, who was arranging the various articles he had to carry, in a commodious form. The nigger was listening, and across his features there flashed an expression of superlative cunning.

"I don't know, I am sure," said Mrs. Farrell, wearily; "it may be somebody living in the wood in seclusion. I can't tell you more than that he is a horrid creature."

She went on ahead, with Romeo in close and obsequious attendance. Eveline and Jim hung back a little.

"What is it?" asked Eveline. "You may tell me. I shall only worry if you don't."

"I think we are about to have trouble with the people who were turned off the island years ago," said Jim, in a low tone of voice. "Be sure you do not wander far from the house alone."

"You have more than that on your mind?" remarked Eveline, keenly.

"I have nothing more certain to tell you," he answered.

"But should you have more to tell by-and-by, you will not keep it from me?"

"No, Evey, I think it will be better for you to know."

They said little more of importance on the way home, and arriving there, they parted at the door, and Jim, feeling he was free to shirk school that day, walked away to the forge.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FINDING OF MR. STEBBING.



MARTIN the blacksmith was alone in the forge, engaged in turning over a lot of old iron, and selecting pieces therefrom.

As the slim, youthful form of Jim darkened the door he looked up, and seeing who it was, gave him a smile of welcome.

"I am picking out some suitable stuff for the bars," he said. "By the way, have you seen Chorker?"

"No," answered Jim.

"He promised to step up and work the bellows for me," said Martin, "but he is a blessed old shirker. He has always something to attend to—his boats, or his nets, or his lobster-pots."

"I will take a turn at it," said Jim, pulling off his coat. "I want some exercise."

"You can do it," said Martin; "and keep your eye on me, so that you can see how the work is done. Afterwards I will take the bellows, and see what you can do with the hammer. As for Chorker, when he turns up I'll tell him he is not wanted. Nothing riles him so much as finding that he can be done without."

The fire was alight, and Jim soon worked it with the bellows into a glowing, white-hot mass. Martin thrust a long piece of iron into the fire, and while it was heating the pair talked of the missing under-master.

"I suppose," said Jim, "that he hasn't come back?"

"No, I am sure of that. Mr. Groby and Rob Changeling have gone off to look for him. Mr. Farrell has taken the master's place. I heard Groby say so. Old Chorker may have gone with them."

He whipped the piece of iron out of the fire, and proceeded to beat it into the required shape. Jim, resting from his labour, watched the process.

"In my belief," he said, suddenly, "we shall not see poor Stebbing again alive."

Martin stopped short and stared at him, amazed.

"What put that into your head?" he asked, somewhat breathlessly.

"It is there," rejoined Jim, "and that is all I can say. Let me have the next turn with the hammer."

They changed places, and Jim set to work on the second bar, Martin observing his movements with a critical eye.

"Well done," he cried, as Jim tossed the result of his labour on the floor to cool, "I could not have shaped it better myself."

"You will spoil me with your kind approval," Jim said, with a smile of deprecation. "Listen! Somebody is pegging up in this direction, and it sounds like Chorker."

It was old Chorker, grizzly, and looking, as he always did, like some figure rudely carved out of gnarled oak. He was agitated, and seemingly bursting with some direful intelligence.

"Stebbing!" he gasped, "we've found him!"

He reeled into the forge, and, on the spur of the moment, sat down upon the anvil. It happened to be hotter than he expected, and he speedily jumped up again.

"Let me sit down somewheres," he said, breathlessly; "I've runned all the way to prepare them at the house for it, and just stopped on the way to let you know."

He had found a seat on the tool-box by this time, where he sat wiping his forehead, and opening and shutting his mouth with a gasping action.

"You—have—found him," said Martin, slowly. "Where?"

"Down in a corner of Silver Bay—dead—*murdered*! Oh, heavens! what is coming to the place? Somebody had buried him, but not deep enough, for the wind had blowed some of the sand away, and one of his hands was sticking up as if asking us to give him a lift out of his grave. Oh! how terrible it was to look at!"

Martin and Jim exchanged glances. There was a puzzled expression on the face of the blacksmith, a look of doubt and distress.

"And you lifted him out of his grave?" said the blacksmith.

"Rob Changeling did. He was stabbed by somebody in the back. The blow killed him right away, so Mr. Groby says. Now I must go and tell them in the house."

"Will you leave it to me?" said Jim, coming forward, and picking up his coat. "I think I can do it better than you. Mrs. Farrell has had one scare this morning, and it must be broken very gently to her."

"For years," cried Old Chorker, "I've been on this island, and there's been naught to break the peace on it. But I knowed it was coming. The signs were for it—red skies, and the fish in the lagoon off their feed. Then I see two blood-coloured lizards on the rocks. I knowed something was coming."

"Keep him here; he is half-gone off his head with excitement," said Jim quietly to Martin, and hurried off to the house.

Opening the front door he passed in. Romeo was engaged in sweeping the hall. On seeing Jim he wheeled about so as to present his back to him.

"Romeo," he said, "something very serious has happened."

"Loramassy!" cried Romeo, clinging tightly to his house-broom, and peering round at Jim. "What de marrer now?"

"I will tell you soon," answered Jim, "at present I'm going to see Mr. Farrell. On my way back I must have a little talk with you. I think you had better meet me outside, at the back of the post-office."

"Massa Gordon," said Romeo, humbly, "what 'bout all de house-work I got to do?"

"Do as I tell you," said Jim, as he hastened towards the class-rooms.

He knew the one in which to find Mr. Farrell, although it was not the principal's usual place. He was in Mr. Groby's room.

Jim opened the door and walked in. About thirty boys were engaged in whispering and talking to each other. Jim saw why they were neglecting their work. Mr. Napoleon Farrell, seated at the desk, was wrapt in meditation, and totally oblivious of immediate things around him.

Jim walked up to the desk, and roused the schoolmaster from his day-dream with a word or two.

"Will you please come out for a moment, sir? Mr. Stebbing has been found."

Their eyes met, and Mr. Farrell shivered as he saw the expression in those of his pupil. Turning to the boys he asked them to behave quietly while he was away, adding, in a mournful tone, "If you are disobedient, you may by-and-by regret it."

Then he left the room with Jim, and they passed on to the hall.

"You may speak here," said Mr. Farrell.

"Mr. Stebbing is dead, sir."

A groan burst from the lips of the schoolmaster.

"He has been murdered," said Jim, softly.

Mr. Farrell reeled to a chair and sat down. He was completely unnerved.

"It will be necessary, sir," continued Gordon, "for some prompt action to be taken to discover who the murderer is. You have absolute power over the island."

"What can I do?" was the feeble query.

Alas for the Napoleonic spirit of the man, where was it? At any other time Jim could have smiled.

"It will be necessary," he continued, "to break this sad news to Mrs. and Miss Farrell, and in such a way as to avoid agitating them, as far as possible."

"I wish you would do it," groaned Mr. Farrell.

"I would rather it were broken to them by someone older than myself."

"But I can't do it, Gordon. I am horribly shaken up. I haven't been myself for weeks, and yesterday I received—— Well, let that pass."

"You received a letter, sir," said Jim, incisively.

"Would it be too much to ask you what were its contents?"

The schoolmaster shook his head.

"I would if I dared," he said, "but I fear to do so."

Jim felt impatient. He saw that the man had not the heart of a mouse. He was a complete contrast to the original man of might whose name had been foisted upon him.

"If I had known of the possibilities that have arisen," he said, lifting a woebegone face to Jim's cool, searching gaze, "I would never have come here. There would have been no Island School."

"But, you see, sir," said Jim, "that you did not know, and the school is here. Surely we are strong enough to defend ourselves until we get help from home."

"How are we to get it?" asked the schoolmaster.

"Send the launch with a message to the Governor of Gibraltar."

"I don't think it would help us. The—the—the launch might never reach there. Indeed, I am sure it would not while a—a—a certain person is alive."

"Who is that person, sir?"

"I dare not tell you."

"Well, sir," said Jim, "I suppose we must leave the matter for the present. Meanwhile, poor Mr. Stebbing is lying dead in Silver Bay, and his body must be brought home. I can attend to it with Martin, and such help as there is outside. But first I must see Mrs. Farrell. I will break the news as gently as possible to her."

"You will find her in the kitchen."

Jim wended his way there, and had a short interview with the lady of the house. She was startled and alarmed, of course, by the intelligence imparted to her, she even shed tears, but on the whole she bore up better than Jim expected.

"Mr. Napoleon Farrell," "being the appointed governor of this island, will, of course," she said, "look up the murderer, and see that he is duly punished."

To this Jim made no rejoinder. After a moment's silence, he asked to see Eveline, and Mrs. Farrell accompanied him up to her daughter's studio, where they found her busy painting.

A few words sufficed to enlighten her about the terrible affair, and she was deeply affected.

"Such a quiet man," she said, "whom could he ever have injured and made an enemy of?"

Jim could not tell, and after a few words to the mother and daughter of a comforting nature, he left them.

Downstairs he hastened, and not finding anyone in the hall, went out in search of Romeo, who was waiting for him at the appointed spot.

CHAPTER IX.

AS A NEST OF ROUSED HORNETS.



THE negro stood by the house, close up, so that he could not be seen from any of the windows. He was in a very agitated state, trembling from head to foot, and rolling his eyes most horribly.

"You need not make too much of your feelings," said Jim; "but collect your-

self, and answer me a few questions."

"Massa Jim," said Romeo, "I powerfully overcome on dis matter, and I ax you for goodness sake not to worry me about it."

"Out with the truth, Romeo," returned Jim; "you saw somebody down in the bay last night."

"No, Massa Jim Gordon," replied Romeo, with a

cunning light in his eyes, "me see nobody in de bay, 'cept dem ole tyrants my fader and grandfader."

"Near the bay, then," said Jim; "I won't be shuffled off. Now, who was it?"

"Massa Gordon," said Romeo, "lemme put a case ob circumstantial to you."

"Go on, but be quick, as time presses."

"If you was out alone in a place 'bout a quarter ob a mile outside Silber Bay, wif nufin' on but a pair ob bathing-drawers, a number ob men wif guns and knives come up to you, and tell you to lie down, what you do?"

"The probabilities are that, being helpless, I should lie down, or perhaps make a run for it."

"S'pose dey close up and leab you no room to run, how den? And if dey make you swar on your bended knees not to say nuffin, and threaten to rip de skin off you back if you say a word, what you do?"

"If I took the oath I should keep it," said Jim.

"Well, den," said Romeo, "dat my persition. I not able to gib you de lease rinking ob what happen, or to gib you a clue to dere bein' such pussons on de island. Boun' hand and foot I am dumb. No 'mount ob torture get a word from me."

"Certainly not," said Jim, gravely. "Romeo, you had better come with me to assist in carrying home Mr. Stebbing, who has been murdered."

There was no shamming in the start and cry that came from Romeo when he heard the terrible tidings. His face quivered, and a sudden expression of anger, rarely seen in his face, leapt up.

"Massa Stebbing murdered!" he said. "Dat kind, quiet genelman? Him as nebber said a rough word to eben a poor nigger? Cuss de ole six ob em, I say!"

"So there were six of them," thought Jim—"the men in the boat, without much doubt. I think I shall know them again."

He bade Romeo follow him, and they hurried to the forge, where Martin and Old Chorker were still in close conversation discussing the tragedy. They sprang up as Jim appeared, and on his briefly stating that they were empowered to do what was necessary, they started at once.

Martin closed and locked up his shop, saying "it would not be open any more that day, of a surety," and away they went for Silver Bay.

Groby, the master, and Rob 'Changeling were still there watching by the body of the grey-haired victim of the assassin. They had utilised a portion of the waiting time by breaking off some branches of trees, growing on the slope facing the bay, and lacing them into a rough hurdle.

On this they laid the body of the dead man, and silently and sadly enough faced for home.

It was not until they were halfway there that the mathematical master, who in the manner of his class

was busy working out the problem of the assassination as he would a sum, turned to Jim and asked if he had heard of anything that would give a clue to the murderer.

"I think there are several in it," answered Jim. "They are strangers to us."

"Have you seen them?"

"No, not on the island, but I saw the men I suspect yesterday at sea."

"You did not suspect them then?"

"How should I?"

Jim felt it would be better to fence with the under-master until something more definite was known of the men, and the subject dropped. When they came in sight of the school, they saw that all work had been suspended for the day.

Every occupant of the big house seemed to be there awaiting the arrival of the *cortège*. As it drew near the boys formed into two lines and allowed the sad procession to pass through.

The body was borne to the room recently occupied by the dead man, and an order was given by Jim to Sleery, the head-carpenter, to get a coffin ready with all speed.

There was no actual commotion in the house, but the faces of the boys and the other masters wore a hard-set expression which showed how deeply they felt this break-in upon the quietude of the island.

Stebbing had always been a quiet, inoffensive man, but he never had the look of a happy one. So far as he was concerned there was a probability that he had lost a life which, by some secret sorrow, was hard to bear. But that was not the point.

He had always been of a most amiable disposition, and his loss would be keenly felt.

There was one burning question, "How are we to find his murderer?" and it ought to have been asked by Mr. Napoleon Farrell. He ought also to have attempted to solve it, but practically he had for the time abandoned the command of his own establishment.

Jim could have commented severely on his lack of nerve, but, for the sake of Eveline, he was dumb so far, when on the shores of the lagoon the boys eventually gathered together.

With the members of the Council of Ten Jim stood erect, while the main body of the boys squatted on the ground in several lines of a semicircular form.

"It was not my intention to say anything to you yet, boys," he said, "but events have been hurrying on during the last twenty-four hours. If I had been asked yesterday morning which was the quietest spot on the earth and the happiest, I should have answered this island. But I cannot say it now."

At that moment Martin, with several of the other teachers of trades, came up and stood behind him.

From afar the only absent member of their body was at work, and there came down to the shore the sound of a hammer as he framed the coffin for the dead man.

"I do not wish to alarm any of you youngsters," continued Jim, "but I know that, take you all round, you don't want for pluck, and so I intend to speak freely. We have some enemy who threatens to be troublesome. We must show a bold front to him—that is, the elder among us must do so. There are some much too young to take action. Now, what I want to do is to form a protective corps of boys who are big enough to have something of a chance with a man in a row. Who joins?"

Up went a little forest of hands. It seemed that all, or nearly all, were ready to join with him.

"That won't do," he said, with a quiet smile; "I see I shall have to choose our men."

He then proceeded to call on the elders to join him, beginning with his brethren of the council, to each of whom he appointed ten followers. Thus there was a little more than half the school practically on active service.

All who were left out grumbled, but he assured them they would have something to do ere long.

"Why do you shut us out?" asked Martin, the blacksmith.

Jim turned to him and said, "You are men, and can form yourselves into a body of your own. I should hesitate to attempt to command men."

"Or to be ordered about by us. Well, I daresay you are right."

Jim had always been a favourite with the boys, and to an extent a leader, but never until that day had he appeared as that of the school. He stepped into the post as if he had a right of birth to it. There were no signs that he was conscious of doing anything unusual, or what could be unpalatable to any others.

The vast majority accepted him without demur. They fell into his guiding without a thought but that it was the right thing to do. But there were some, as there would have been in any community, who looked on in a grudging spirit, and secretly resented his pushing himself forward.

They did not, however, say anything at the time, and after a short general address on the advisability of their keeping cool and collected, he finished thus:

"To-day we can do nothing. Any attempt to search the island for the assassins would end in failure. It is too big for that. Nor may it be in our power to do much to-morrow or the next day. It is impossible to say at present what we may be called upon to perform. Meanwhile, until the morning, when no doubt our murdered master will be buried in some fitting spot, you will remember the solemn event of to-day and carry yourselves in harmony with it."

There were many signs of approval, but no cheering, as he finished. They all felt that would be out of place at that solemn time. The gathering broke up into parties, the men in a body together, and conversing in whispers, and the boys sauntering up and down, softly conversing. They could have but one theme that day—the untimely death of Stephen Stebbing.

Jim Gordon returned to the house with the object of again seeing its head, and he turned his steps towards the private room of the schoolmaster.

"The youngsters were very quiet," thought Jim, "but they are aroused, and have all the bitterness if more quiet than a nest of hornets disturbed by a stranger. Now, if I can only get at exactly who and what we have to fight, I think that we can give a good account of ourselves."

CHAPTER X.

NAPOLEON WILL NOT FIGHT.—FUNERAL OF THE UNDER-MASTER.



KNOCK at the door, and a request to come in, brought Jim into the presence of Mr. Napoleon Farrell. He had his wife with him close to his side, and they were about to open a box standing on the table hard by.

"Oh, it is you, Gordon," said Mr. Farrell, miserably.

"I thought it might be. You have been of great use in this sad emergency. Quite a help. This is poor Stebbing's box. We were about to open it to see if we could find any clue to his friends or relations."

"You did not know them, sir?" exclaimed Jim, surprised.

"No, nor even where he came from," said the schoolmaster.

"Perhaps he had none, poor fellow!" said Mrs. Farrell, wiping a tear from her eye.

"Shall I come in again, sir, later on?" asked Jim.

"By no means," said Mr. Farrell; "it will be as well, perhaps, if you are here—in case of any valuables."

He had the key of the box, and he opened it. On raising the lid a quantity of well-worn clothes, neatly laid away, was disclosed. Having lifted them out in a body, Mr. Farrell found a heap of small things, such as lonely men collect and keep. There were knives, pencil-cases, wooden boxes, cases of drawing instruments, a variety of other things, and a bundle of letters.

The latter were opened out and spread upon the table. But a glance at them showed they would not be at all helpful. The ink was faded, and the dates of many years before. They were probably the precious letters of early life.

"There is nothing to help us," said Mrs. Farrell. "Poor fellow! he either outlived or lost all his friends."

Jim, who had been a silent watcher of the examination of the box and its contents, looked casually about him, and discovered that on the floor there was something worthy of his attention.

It was a letter, recently written, and had, to all appearance, been dropped out from the heap of clothes in the act of removal from the box.

It was a thought—an inspiration, perhaps—that led him to drop his handkerchief upon the letter, pick up both together, and transfer them to his pocket without calling the attention of the schoolmaster or his wife to its existence.

That done, he came to the business that brought him thither. It was to ask for directions concerning the funeral of Stephen Stebbing.

"I hope you will forgive me, sir, for being importunate," he said, "but nobody else seems to take the initiative."

"It is my duty to give directions," said the schoolmaster, thrusting his hand into the breast of his coat and standing erect. "For the time, Gordon, you can be my *aide-de-camp*, conveying my orders to the outer world. I do not think, grievous as this affair is, that it will call for any extraordinary action on my part. The probability is that he met his death at the hand of some robber who had landed for a brief spell on our shores. It is still more probable that, having committed this deed in haste, the man has fled and will not return."

"But surely, sir, you will search the island as far as you are able?"

"No, Gordon, no. And should you see anyone about—but of course you will not—it is not possible."

"I should think, sir," said Gordon, with a curled lip, "that any stranger discovered on the island ought to be arrested and commanded to give an account of himself. It is *your* island, sir, held by authority of the Spanish Government. You will, at the least, report this terrible crime?"

"Yes; I will see to it anon. An account of it shall be sent to our people at home."

Jim looked from the schoolmaster to his wife. The latter looked almost as much puzzled as Jim himself at the extraordinary supineness of the schoolmaster.

"There may be need for action," pursued Mr. Farrell, "but it must not be hasty. A true general is always deliberate in his movements."

"And you are one born to it," murmured Mrs. Farrell, regarding him with unbounded admiration.

Jim could not endorse this statement. He was beginning to see very clearly that the Napoleonic element in the schoolmaster was practically confined to his name. He again called attention to the real object of his coming.

"Ah! just so," said Mr. Farrell. "Choose a spot on the slope going up to the castle, and tell Sleery and Waffle to dig the grave. The funeral will take place at five o'clock to-morrow, and Mr. Groby will read the burial service. I shall not be able to attend."

Once more Jim stared at him in surprise. Mrs. Farrell uttered an exclamation of astonishment and deprecation.

"My dear Nap!" she said.

"It is not expedient," said the schoolmaster, hurriedly. "I do not feel that I can be of any great service to the poor fellow now. The ceremony can go on without me."

Jim merely replied, "Very well, sir," and left the room. The bearing of Mr. Farrell was most puzzling, but Jim decided in his own mind not to make mention of it to anyone for the present.

He saw Martin and the other working-men, and gave them their instructions. Mr. Groby, on hearing the part he was to play in the sad ceremony, expressed his wonderment, and said: "It is Mr. Farrell's place to be there and read the service."

"But he can't come," returned Jim, drily.

Until then he had made no attempt to read the letter he picked up from the floor of the study; but on leaving Mr. Groby he sauntered to a quiet spot away from the house, and perused it. The epistle was of a totally different nature to what he expected. The writing was neat, but somewhat cramped, and the wording as follows:

"TO THE SAD SENOR WHO WALKS MUCH ALONE,—

"Does the memory of the woman you have seen once on the island remain with you? You are chivalrous—noble—and will help one in distress. Say, then, if you will not come to the spot where you see her. What is age to me? I am young—thou art grey; but shall I not love you for your heart? Come, then, when the sun peeps above the sea in the morning.

"LUCIA."

"Now, what am I to make of this?" thought Jim, as he folded the letter and put it back into his pocket. "No strange woman has ever been seen on the island, and yet one has been here and making love to poor old Stebbing. For what? To take his life, it seems—unless it was some jealous lover of the woman who slew him. The writing is hardly a woman's hand, either. A man wrote it, I will swear, but who is he?"

Jim was more and more puzzled the more he thought the matter over, and he had eventually to abandon further consideration of it.

At the hour appointed on the morrow the funeral took place.

The entire school was paraded as mourners, with the Council of Ten at its head, following the rough bier on which Martin and the other men had placed the coffin. They carried it to the grave that had been dug on the slope under an acacia-tree, the band playing the "Dead March" with solemn effect.

The boys walked bareheaded and silent, impressed by the untimely end of the under-master, and the fact that it was the first funeral that had in their time taken place on the island.

They laid the coffin in the grave, and Mr. Groby, who was on most intimate terms with the murdered man, read the service in a voice broken by emotion. Before dismissing the assembled mourners, he addressed a few words to them.

"My dear boys," he said, "I need not tell you how keenly I feel the loss of one who was my friend, especially under circumstances so shrouded in mystery and filled with horror. It would have been bad enough to have lost him any way, but it is terrible that he should have been removed from us by the hand of an assassin. Who that assassin is I cannot even guess. There is no man in the wide world to whom I can point and say: 'Thou didst it.' Whether others among us are in peril of our lives or not I cannot tell. Time will reveal. But it is necessary for us to be wary. You must none of you wander alone, but in parties, and do not go far from home. I will confer with Mr. Farrell on the subject of doing something to bring the murderer to justice. To-morrow you may hear something of the decision we have arrived at. Disperse."

The circle of boys and men who had formed round the grave broke quietly away and returned to the schoolhouse, where they gathered in groups, discussing, as well they might, the mystery of the whole thing.

Jim, with the majority of the school Council of Ten, stood by the closed door of the blacksmith's shop. There was the thoughtfulness of men upon their faces.

"It seems to me like a dream," said Lawrence Terry.

"It is real enough," said Adam Steene; "but a mystery of mysteries. All the time we have been on this island—I have been here a year—we have never seen a living person outside ourselves."

"Why was not Nap at the funeral?" asked Dave Felton.

"He is too much unnerved to do anything," answered Jim. "It is a fact that he is horribly shaken up; but whether by this affair alone, or by others in conjunction, I can't say. Anyway, we have an enemy who at present doesn't show in the open. Suppose we hold a meeting to-morrow in the old place—say at half-past seven, after we have had our morning dip in the sea?"

"One cannot talk with a clear head to-day," said Morse, who had hitherto been silent. "The upset has been too violent. We are in the position of people in the thick of the smoke immediately after the explosion. We can see nothing clearly."

"Morse is always on the combustible business," said Terry.

"You may be glad of Morse and his combustibles before long," said the young chemist, as he walked away.

The day closed as solemnly as it had begun. There was none of the usual fun among the boys, and no recreation indulged in anywhere. A sense of impending further calamity was over them all.

CHAPTER XI.

JIM MEETS A FIERY FAIRY.—PLANNING THE FORTS.



FEW words on the origin of the Island School may be welcome here. It is not our intention to weary the reader with a long divergence from the main thread of our story. The little we have to say on the point is, however, essential.

Mr. Napoleon Farrell, a few years before the time we write of, inherited a sum of money that left him independent in a moderate way. He could have retired to a substantial villa in the suburbs of London or elsewhere, and lived happily enough, but for a restless dream he had had in his mind from his youth. He longed to be a leader and a ruler among men and boys.

In his youth he thought he would like to become a great general or naval officer; but there were certain preliminaries in the way from which he shrank.

Great admirals and generals are not made without a course of fighting. In battles there is bloodshed, and wounds, and too often death, which brings heroes to a full stop. Mr. Farrell had a deep respect for his skin and bones, and was particularly desirous of saving both from injury.

Therefore he gave up the idea of army or navy, and turned his thoughts in other directions.

The idea of the Island School was a long time in coming, but it came at last.

He had risen from youth to manhood, married, and been blessed with a lovely daughter for ten years ere the notion of keeping the Island School flashed upon him.

It offered him what he wanted—absolute mastery of some place with the people on it.

He went to one of the tourist agents and explained

what he wanted. In two months the island of Fermentera was, for a certain consideration, leased to him by the Spanish Government.

Then the agent helped him towards the arrangement of the school and its discipline, drew up the circulars, and sent them out—in short, conducted the whole preliminary business for him.

He started with forty pupils, but in six months had a hundred.

The idea caught on with certain parents and guardians who had boys whom they wished educated away from home. Some sent them because they wished to get rid of them for one, two, or three years—the time was optional—and so the school grew to its present dimensions, and all had gone well with it until that day when the attempt was made to run down the felucca boat carrying the mails for the island.

It must be remembered that Napoleon Farrell had one rule with regard to his school. The boy who came for a year, or two, or three, as the case might be, had to stay the time, and once he went away he could be admitted again no more.

There were holidays, of course, but the rule was to spend them on the island.

Having thus explained the origin and scheme of the school as it emanated really from the dual brains of Mr. Farrell and the tourist agent, we will proceed with our story.

The clanging of a big bell aroused the boys on the following morning, and the sound of scampering feet was immediately heard about the house. It was the morning for swimming lessons and practising the art, and in every variety of undress the youngsters ran out of the house and down to the sea.

Old Chorker and Rob Changeling were awaiting them, each with a boat in readiness to go to the assistance of any of the less experienced who might get out of their depth.

Old Chorker was the nominal swimming master, but, strange to say, nobody had ever seen him swim. What he lacked in practice he made up in theory.

This peculiar omission to exemplify that which he taught had often been commented on by the elder boys, and an opinion had got possession of them that Old Chorker was *all* theory and no practice.

"It's all very well," said Lawrence Terry, as he twisted the towel about his neck, and left the house in the company of Tom Dawson and George Rainstone, "for the old beggar to sit in a boat and bawl out, 'Now then, keep your head up and strike out, as if you wasn't afeard of a bucket of water,' or 'Take it easy. Strike steadily—don't show any funk. You won't be drowned with me here.'"

"Has he ever saved anyone from drowning?" asked Rainstone.

"Not that I ever heard of," answered Terry. "Look here: let us upset the old man from his boat and see what he can do. We can all swim, and if we work round to the other side while he is leaning over the shore side of his boat bellowing his orders to the small fry, we can easily tilt it up, so that out he goes."

"Suppose he can't swim?" suggested Tom Dawson.

"There isn't more than five feet of water where he keeps muddling about in his boat," said Terry; "he looks after those who are learning to swim, and lets those who can, look after themselves."

"All right," said Dawson, "I'm on."

"We can dive the moment we've done it," suggested Terry, "and come up the moment after the catastrophe, as much astonished as anybody. If we manage things in the O. K. style we need not be found out. Mind you, if ever you let Chorker know, he will never forgive us, and he is a venomous old beast when roused."

It was a morning of mornings even for that sunny latitude. The sun, not yet risen high enough to make his rays scorching, shone in a cloudless sky. The blue of the mighty arch overhead was that of turquoise, but transparent withal.

The sea was a mixture of molten gold and silver, the wind soft and warm, yet balmy and invigorating. A model morning from Nature's store of the beautiful and wonderful.

Grief is not lasting, we are happy to record, especially in the young, for which the Giver of all good be thanked, and the darkness of the day before was forgotten in the sunshine of the new-born day.

The air rippled with the laughter of the young and happy. If there was a heavy heart, as there may have been, or a mind weighed down with earnest thought, as there undoubtedly was, neither made themselves conspicuous in the general song of gladness.

The shore of the lagoon swarmed with youngsters tossing off the apparel they loosely wore, and that done there was a tearing down and a race into the pleasantly warm salt-water.

Rob Changeling, firmly convinced that his services would not and could not be required, was lying in the bow of his boat with his heels in the air and an extraordinarily black clay-pipe in his mouth. Old Chorker was, as usual, on the alert, fully imbued with the importance of his position as swimming-master.

"Now, then," he cried, "all you as want to have a little instruction—*thas* way. Them as can swim can learn aft. In the water, the fast thing for a l'arner is to try to float on his stomach. He can do it if he's got a hounce of narve, but if he is a funkier, he'll go to the bottom like a plummet. Heasy all! Simple!"

He roared out the name of the boy he was address-

ing, quite a little fellow, who was timidly entering the water. The boy looked up.

"Come along, with yer, as if you wasn't afraid on it," roared Old Chorker. "If there is anything as turns me over and makes me sick of boys, it is to see them crawling inter the water as if they was afraid on it. There ain't nuthin' to be afraid on"—he leant over the side of the boat and dabbled with the salt-water to give force to his remarks—"a baby, with narve is safe as—Help! murder!"

The plot originating in Lawrence Terry was carried out. Three sturdy youngsters on the outside of the boat heeled it over, and Old Chorker, after a fight to keep his balance, pitched headlong into the sea.

He fell into but five feet of water—not much to a swimmer and a man of nerve, but Chorker was a humbug, and had not the least practical knowledge of natation, nor had he more nerve than was requisite for ordinary occasions. In extraordinary ones he lost it altogether.

Floundering in the shallow water he roared for help as man had seldom roared before.

His pupils, the learners, the young beginners, fled in dismay towards the shore, associating his cries with possible death by drowning for themselves.

Rob Changeling awoke from a doze into which he had fallen, and, springing up, stared about him to see what was the matter.

Close under the lee-side of his boat was Lawrence Terry, who was treading water, apparently in the highest state of excitement.

"Chorker's drowning!" he yelled. "Why don't you go to his rescue?"

"Well, I'm blowed!" was all Rob Changeling said, as he seized the oars and pulled in the direction of the floundering swimming-master.

Up to that moment he had believed Old Chorker, entirely through his personal statements, to be a master of the art.

But here he was floundering as scarcely mortal man floundered on land or in the water, and screaming and yelling for help like a dozen drowning persons rolled into one.

Whether it was generally known among the boys, or only guessed that there was no danger, it is impossible to say, but on their part no attempt was made to assist the man who verily believed he was doomed to sink and drown. The task was left to Rob Changeling, who pulled with might and main to the spot.

"Steady, old man!" he said, as he shipped the oars and, leaning over the side of the boat, grasped the terrified man by the arm.

Old Chorker, feeling he had something to lay hold of, clung to Rob's extended arm in the desperation of despair. He hung upon him with all his might, and

an expostulation from Rob was cut short by his being violently dragged out of his boat into the water.

"Confound you for an old idiot!" he roared, as they tumbled about together like a pair of grampuses locked in deadly conflict.

Well for both that the water was not deep and Rob pretty strong, or the pair might have been drowned in real earnest.

But the younger man soon feeling his feet, he unceremoniously dragged Old Chorker to the shore, where they fell upon the sands together.

Even then the swimming—"master" could not realise, as he ought to have done, that the peril was past, but continued to roll about and call for help until he was exhausted. Then, and not until then, he became aware of his being safe and sound on *terra firma*.

Rob Changeling—wet through, and his duck suit of clothes pulled into all sorts of twists, and rent in places—got upon his feet and surveyed the old seaman in bitterness and disgust.

"Well," he said, "you are a pretty swimming-master, ain't you? I calls you a human cork—a reg'lar bunt. Ain't you ashamed o' yourself?"

"Can't I have a bit of fun," roared Old Chorker, "without you interfering?"

"Oh! fun you calls it?" sneered Rob.

"What else do you think it was?" demanded Chorker. "I ses to myself this mornin', ses I, 'When the boys are a-bathin' I'll hupset myself and holler like a drowned pusson, just to show them how ridicklus a man looks in a skeer.' Then afore I could shift about and show 'em how to take it coolly, you must shove in a oar."

There was a grinning lot of boys around, just emerged from the deep like young mermen. Rob stared at them in a way that invited them to say what they thought of Old Chorker's performance. Lal Brodie was one of the party, and he called out:

"Of course, anyone could see that Chorker was joking. It was so well done *that we should like to see it again*, with his taking drowning coolly to follow."

"Yes," cried a chorus of voices, "that's the sort! Do it again!"

"I for one," said Rob Changeling, emphatically, "should unkindly like to see the fun repeated."

"And do yer suppose," said Old Chorker, with overwhelming scorn, "that I'm agoin' to lower myself by doin' of it?"

"You can't swim for winkles," said Rob.

"I've done more in the swimmin' line than you iver dreamt of!" sneered Chorker. "Now the next time you see me a hillustrating the art of keepin' cool in the water—you hear, keepin' cool in the water—you just mind your own business."

"Take your hoath of that," growled Rob, pulling

off his wet jacket. "Mind this—the next time you go a hillustrating the art of keepin' cool, I'll let you finish it right orf."

"That's all I axes," said Chorker; "and now, if one of you boys will jest shove my boat in, we'll resume the work of the morning."

Jim Gordon having had a hasty dip in the sea, had re-dressed himself, and with a smile at the picture presented by Chorker and his rescuer, hastened up to the castle to keep the rendezvous with the rest of the Council of Ten. He was absolutely the first to start, the others only being half-way through the process of resuming their attire.

Jim saw no fear for himself, especially as he was armed. The revolver entrusted to him by Mr. Farrell he had retained, and carried it loaded in his pocket, ready for any emergency.

It was a dangerous weapon for a hasty-dispositioned or nervous lad to possess, but Jim was neither one nor the other. He had nerves of iron, and could be as cool as a cucumber, even under very startling circumstances.

We have before now made reference to the light tread that was natural to Jim. When bounding up the stone path leading to the castle the sound he made was infinitely small. Unless some attention was paid by a person in his vicinity he would scarcely have been heard.

This morning his tread was even lighter than usual.

He was fresh from a dip in the sea, and the influence of the morning elevated his spirits. He skimmed up the pathway as a swallow flies up the hill-side.

On reaching the bridge outside the castle he paused to get breath. Not that he had lost much, but the pace he travelled at necessarily set him breathing a little quicker than usual.

As he did so a woman emerged from the interior of the castle, walking along pensively with her eyes upon the ground.

The amazement Jim felt was overwhelming, for this woman was not only a stranger, but young and beautiful. In dress and face she was Spanish, and of the better class.

Her simple dress, worn rather short, was of the best material, and her lace veil, hanging down her back, of the richest workmanship.

An exclamation of surprise burst from Jim. The woman started, and thrusting her hand into her bosom, snatched out a stiletto. But as her eyes met those of Jim she as quickly replaced it. The whole thing was the work of a moment.

"Pardon," she said, "I thought I was alone."

Her English was good, with a strong Spanish accent, however Jim, not knowing what else to do, raised his cap and bowed.

"I suppose you wonder," the woman went on. "It is an intrusion—granted. But you will not betray me. I think you still all at your bathe—in the sea, or I would not be here."

"I was not aware we had a strange lady on the island," said Jim, rather helplessly.

She smiled, showing a radiant set of teeth. Her eyes, so soft and dark, rested pleadingly on his.

"You are good and handsome—a true English boy," she said, softly. "I place myself at your mercy. It is not my wish to be seen here. I go away now, to return no more."

"Excuse me, *senorita*," said Jim—he saw there was no wedding-ring upon her finger—"but this is private property, belonging to Mr. Farrell. You are a lady, or I should feel it necessary to detain you. A recent event of a serious nature has taken place on the island——"

"I know nothing of your events," she interposed, with a smile, the sweetness of which Jim had never seen surpassed. Indeed, he thought at the moment he had never before beheld lips that could part with such thrilling effect. "I am here alone. I come in my little boat—my *felucca*, from *Minorca*."

"Is it possible?" cried Jim.

"*Senor*, do I look as if I lie?"

She certainly did not, and Jim felt very weak in the presence of so much womanly beauty and, presumably, truth.

"You say you are going back again?" he said, slowly.

"At this hour," she answered. "I have not seen that which I came to see, but no matter—another time. I come to see the young *senorita*, the school-master's daughter."

Jim's face involuntarily flushed. A light laugh burst from the Spanish woman's lips. We call her a woman, but in years she was little more than a girl.

"I see," she said, nodding her head, "you admire her, and as boys will—love her. Is she so very beautiful?"

"I think so," answered Jim; "she is very nice, anyway."

The slightest of frowns settled on the brow of the Spanish woman; but she smiled the next moment.

"I heard so in *Minorca*," she said, "so I come to see. Because I love all beauty, and your English women are so soft and fair."

"But *Eveline*—Miss *Farrell*—has never been in *Minorca*," said Jim; "how can they know anything of her there?"

"They do," answered the woman, with a light wave of the hand; "they speak of her, and so I say to myself, 'I will go and see her because she is so beautiful,' and I sail my *felucca* across the sea in the night, and I hope to see her in the morning. But behold, it is

nothing but boys and men, so I come up here to look at the castle; for it was here that my forefathers dwelt—you stare, young *senor*, but it is so—and I wander sadly through the silent halls. Coming forth to go to my boat, I behold you. *Senor*, I wish to leave as I came—unknown. Shall it be so? I am at your mercy."

"Where is your boat lying?" asked Jim, still imbued with the idea that this woman was part of the stranger crew he had seen approaching the island, and therefore, on that account, ought to be detained.

She motioned in the direction opposite to that of the Silver Bay.

"And you are quite alone?"

"I have said, *senor*. If I lie once, shall I not lie twice?"

She walked past him, and he could not decide how to act. After all, what was a woman? She did not look like a spy, and, barring that slight incident of the stiletto, had been as gentle as a dove. But was it not a woman who had written to the murdered man?

There was no wonder Jim felt nonplussed. He wished that his companions would come, so that he might take counsel with them; but they lingered in a most unaccountable manner.

"May I ask you a question?" inquired Jim.

"Two, if you will," she replied; "but hasten, or I may lose the morning wind."

"Is your name *Lucia*?"

The question brought a flush of amazement to her cheeks. It was several moments ere she answered it.

"My name," she said, "is *Lucia di Valo*; but how is it for you to know it?"

"I have a letter in my possession you wrote to one of our masters," said Jim.

"I wrote to—one of your masters," she rejoined, slowly; "who tells the lie?"

"An appointment was made for him to meet you in Silver Bay, or near there," continued Jim. "He went there to keep that appointment, and was murdered."

"I know nothing of him or his death," said *Lucia di Valo*, with a curled lip. She was not moved on hearing of the murder. "Am I so poor in lovers that I must ask of him, or anyone, to meet me here?"

"See the letter," said Jim, producing it and holding it up before her.

She glanced at it and laughed.

"It is a man's writing," she said; "and now, pretty boy, I must go."

"If you could tell me who wrote it——" Jim began, but she interrupted him.

"I know nothing of it; how should I? Farewell."

She turned quickly and sprang into the wood on the side of the path. It sloped down to the sea, and Jim, hurrying to the verge, saw her bounding down the

broken ground with a free and fearless step, until she vanished below.

"A beautiful fairy," he muttered, "with a spice of mischief in her. Have I done right to let her go? Yes, because I very much doubt [if I could have detained her, She wanted to see Eveline. I believe she did. But why? Darker and deeper grows the mystery of things that are happening here."

Partly because he felt he was wrong in letting the fascinating stranger go without learning more about her, and partly because he could not see what good would come of mentioning the meeting to anyone, he thought he would say nothing about her—at least not yet awhile.

The voices of the other members of the council broke in upon his troubled reverie, and assuming his usual nonchalant air, he awaited their coming.

They were all together, with Terry at their head. He gaily asked why they were summoned.

"I want to plan some forts hereabouts," said Jim, "for fun, you know. But we will make them good enough for serious work."

"Why don't you speak out, Gordon?" said Morse. "The truth must be spoken at one time or another."

"As you please," said Jim. "Boys, we may have ere long to defend ourselves from a foe, to fight like men, and the forts are to defend the schoolhouse. Sit down and I will tell you all about it."

CHAPTER XII.

ALL ABOUT IT.



FOR the first time the members of the council knew all that was, in Jim's belief, inimical to their safety on the island. With an intelligence that would have been creditable to a man of years, he pointed out the shadow of coming dangers, and the full portent of the

death of Stephen Stebbing.

"There is no doubt," he said, "that Mr. Napoleon Farrell has been carrying on the school in a state of false security. The people ousted from the island are at the bottom of the death of our late master. They intend to clear us out, or to terrify us into leaving. But here our Napoleon comes out poorly. He made very good provision for getting upon the island, but there is absolutely none for our getting away, in case of a sudden emergency."

"But I suppose we shall be able to leave if it should be found necessary?" said Joe Ganthonny.

Jim looked doubtful.

"Only a small portion of us at a time," he said, "What we must do is to keep together until we can all be taken off by a party of friends from home. Of course, if it were known that we are threatened, all the assistance we need would soon be on hand."

"You see there is so little to tell," said Morse; "at present what sort of yarn have we to spin? They might say that the running down—the attempted running down—of the mail boat was imaginary. As for the murder of poor Stebbing, that is serious enough, but may be put down to a private hatred. We all made such a big bragging business about the Island School, that our return in a body suffering from the blue funk will make us ridiculous."

"You want to stay and fight?" said Dave Felton.

"If it comes to that," replied Morse; "but if the game of the enemy is piecemeal assassination of the men first and us afterwards, the look out is a poor one."

"Who is the woman you tell us was here this morning?" asked Terry.

"I should like to know," said Jim Gordon. "I was a fool to let her go, but she had a lot of the cat in her composition, and would have clawed me had I attempted to detain her."

"She was also so very pretty," remarked Ganthonny, drily, "and Jim's heart is soft."

"I did not intend to say anything about her," rejoined Jim, with a flushed face, "and if you think her beauty has anything to do with my letting her go, you are precious mistaken. Now what shall we do? Will it be wise for the whole school to know everything?"

"No," said Morse, "there are a lot of little fellows, who will be in a state of mortal terror; but the forts must be got ready at once. Jim had better ask Napoleon's leave."

Finally it was agreed to get on with that work at once, if leave could be obtained, and await further developments from the mysterious foe.

Then, as it was getting near breakfast time, they returned to the house.

Among the council two had especial cause for uneasiness. They were Tim Dawson and George Rainstone.

They had patches of ground some distance from the school to look after, one on the eastern side, about two miles from the sea. This was under the care of Dawson, and was known as "The Farm."

It was in fact a market-garden, which he, as the son of a farmer, knew how to cultivate. All the vegetables required for the house were grown there, and he had a score of the boys who acted under his directions as assistant cultivators.

Twice a week they went in the afternoon to plant, or hoe, or perform some other necessary act in con-

nection with the cultivation. They also gathered in the crops in season for daily use, or stored them away for a later season.

To the north, round a point in the island, was another spot where a variety of fruit, including the grape, was grown. The climate being favourable, the labour was light, but what had to be done was carried out under the direction of Rainstone.

He was the son of a nobleman's gardener, and from observation and teaching when very young, knew something of the business of fruit cultivation.

Probably the work of both Dawson and Rainstone was crude, but it served on that favoured island to supply the needs of the school.

It was not pleasant to think of what might probably happen to them as they went to and fro. Almost daily the two young principals made a journey to the grounds under their care, sometimes alone, but generally, on what were known as off days, with one or two companions.

Their object then was to gather and bring home the produce for daily use.

It was now an off day with Dawson, and in the afternoon he would have to visit the farm simply to get a supply of vegetables.

He could not look forward to the task with the pleasure he usually felt.

It was a busy day at the school, for Martin had managed at an early hour to prepare a number of the iron bars ordered by the schoolmaster, and it was proposed to put them in their places in the afternoon, and Jim was invited to assist.

He was unable in the morning to get the interview he desired with Mr. Farrell, and it was not until after dinner, when he opportunely caught him as he was going from the dining-room, where he had occupied the seat lately belonging to the hapless Stephen Stebbings.

"I shall be very glad to speak with you for a minute, sir," said Jim.

The schoolmaster looked at him haggardly. It was painful to note the change a few days had wrought in his appearance.

"Nothing bad to report I hope, Gordon?" he said.

"No, sir. I only want leave to carry out something Morse and I have been talking about."

They entered the study, and there Jim laid the plan of making the forts before the amazed schoolmaster. He was not such a fool as to think it was a notion founded on pleasure, although Jim tried his best to make it appear so.

"It will be a change from the ordinary work, sir," he said. "I understand there is little to do in the shops, and all the boys could be put on the job so as to get it smartly done."

"Forts are little good without soldiers," said Mr. Farrell, feebly.

"Oh, we intend to play at soldiers, too," said Jim, cheerfully. "There are the Enfields, if you would let us have them. They shall be well taken care of."

"I leave it to you," said the schoolmaster, irresolutely; "but be careful you do not get into mischief."

"There is little harm in firing caps," said Jim. "I will take care of them, too. To-night we shall all be busy writing letters, as the mail goes out to-morrow. I was going to ask another favour, sir. It is, that instead of spending the day looking out for the steamer, I may stay at home and begin on the fort work. Chorker could go with the boat."

"Very well," said Mr. Farrell, "it shall be so. Excuse me now, as I have some very important letters to write."

Jim having got all he wanted, hastened away, and told Morse, who retired to his laboratory, and spent the afternoon there in the—to him—pleasurable pursuit of manufacturing gunpowder.

Martin set Jim to work fixing the bars in the boudoir of Eveline, who was there with her mother, one sewing and the other painting.

"It seems to me a most ridiculous thing," said Mrs. Farrell, "making the windows ugly with those bars. Does Mr. Farrell think there are any burglars about?"

"They won't do any harm," said Jim, "and I dare say he does it to give us something to do. There has been very little work for the blacksmith of late."

"I wonder who killed poor Mr. Stebbings?" said Mrs. Farrell in the way of propounding a conundrum. She did not seem to realise the full importance of that tragic event. Not getting any reply, she went on:

"He was very slow and dull, and not a relative in the world. He hadn't much to live for."

"That is no reason for his being killed," remarked Jim, quietly.

The entrance of Mr. Farrell cut short the conversation. He walked up to the window and inspected Jim's work, testing the strength of the screws Jim was using, and measuring the size of the bars with his finger and thumb.

"These ought to be strong enough," he mused.

"They are ugly enough," remarked Mrs. Farrell, lightly. "My dear Nap, why do you have such ridiculous things put up here?"

"Dawson is going on to the farm," said the schoolmaster, ignoring the question; "he wants to know, Gordon, if you will accompany him. Romeo can be spared to carry the baskets and help with the return loads."

"I shall have finished in a few minutes," said Jim, "and then, sir, I can go with him."

"It is four o'clock," said Mr. Farrell, referring to

his watch; "you had better have some tea first. There will be plenty of time for you to get back before sunset."

"They can have it here, papa," suggested Eveline, "with us. It will save work below. Macbeth and Hamlet say they have a great deal too much to do."

"Here, by all means," said the schoolmaster. "I will send Dawson up."

CHAPTER XIII.

FOOTSTEPS ON THE FARM.



AFTER a most delightful tea with the ladies, unhampered by the presence of Mr. Nap Farrell, the two youngsters started with Romeo for the farm.

The road to it was half-way to Silver Bay along the beach, and then through a chine to a level part of the land in the interior.

The farm, so called, consisted of about ten acres of ground at the base of the higher lands. It had the appearance of being scooped out of the hills on which the castle and woods were visible. The soil was rich, and in that sheltered position the temperature on a hot day was that of a hothouse. Things leaped from the earth almost. The rapid growth of all the produce was wonderful.

And, of course, the weeds also grew apace, some of them taller than a man, and the work of clearing away never done.

There were always patches of grasses and docks among the growing crops that would have given cover for a dozen men or a considerable quantity of game.

Romeo carried over his head three rush-baskets, fixed inside each other. They acted as a sort of sunshade to his bare, woolly pate, and in that position enabled him to walk at his ease with his hands in his pockets.

Gordon and Dawson led the way with the nigger one pace in the rear. They were conversing in an undertone, much to Romeo's disgust, he being afflicted with an all-consuming curiosity about things that did not concern him.

"Pears to me," he said, suddenly, "dat manners goin' out ob fashing."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Jim, looking back.

"It ginerally 'sidered rude to whisper in company," said Romeo.

"But surely you don't consider yourself company?" retorted Jim.

"It for you, Massa Gordon, to 'sider dat," shrewdly replied Romeo.

"Well," said Jim, laughing, "we won't offend again. We were speaking of that wonderful bathing experience of yours."

"Berrer not speak ob dat," said Romeo; "we near de chine."

"What has the chine to do with that?"

"Nuffin', Massa Gordon."

He glanced uneasily about them, for they were now at the mouth of the chine, one of those great splits in the line of rocks that are frequently found in rough shores of the sea. Examples of them are to be found in our own Isle of Wight, in the chines of Black Gang and Ventnor.

Jim quietly nudged Dawson, and they both kept a covert watch upon the negro as he pushed on in front and led through the narrow broken way.

He was never in a great hurry in his every-day life, his movements being characterised as a rule by a most exasperating deliberation. Now he tripped over the ground with the light foot and at the speed of one who is engaged in a walking-match against time.

As he had the baskets over his head they could not see his face or observe the movements of his features.

In the chine there were many nooks and corners on which the sun never shone. And there the fern grew in wild luxuriance, nourished by the slow dripping of water from the high lands. Some were of tropical size and splendour, rising eight, nine, and ten feet from the soil.

They stood in groups, miniature palm clumps, and behind some of them were yawning mouths of caves of various sizes.

The majority of them were mere hollows, and all had in turn been visited by the boys when out on their occasional roaming expeditions.

There was nothing remarkable in the size of any of them, although there were three or four in which comfortable room for a dozen people was to be found.

Jim scanned these places as they passed, but observed nothing unusual until he came to a clump of ferns about twenty feet above their heads, and there he saw unmistakable signs of the recent presence of visitors.

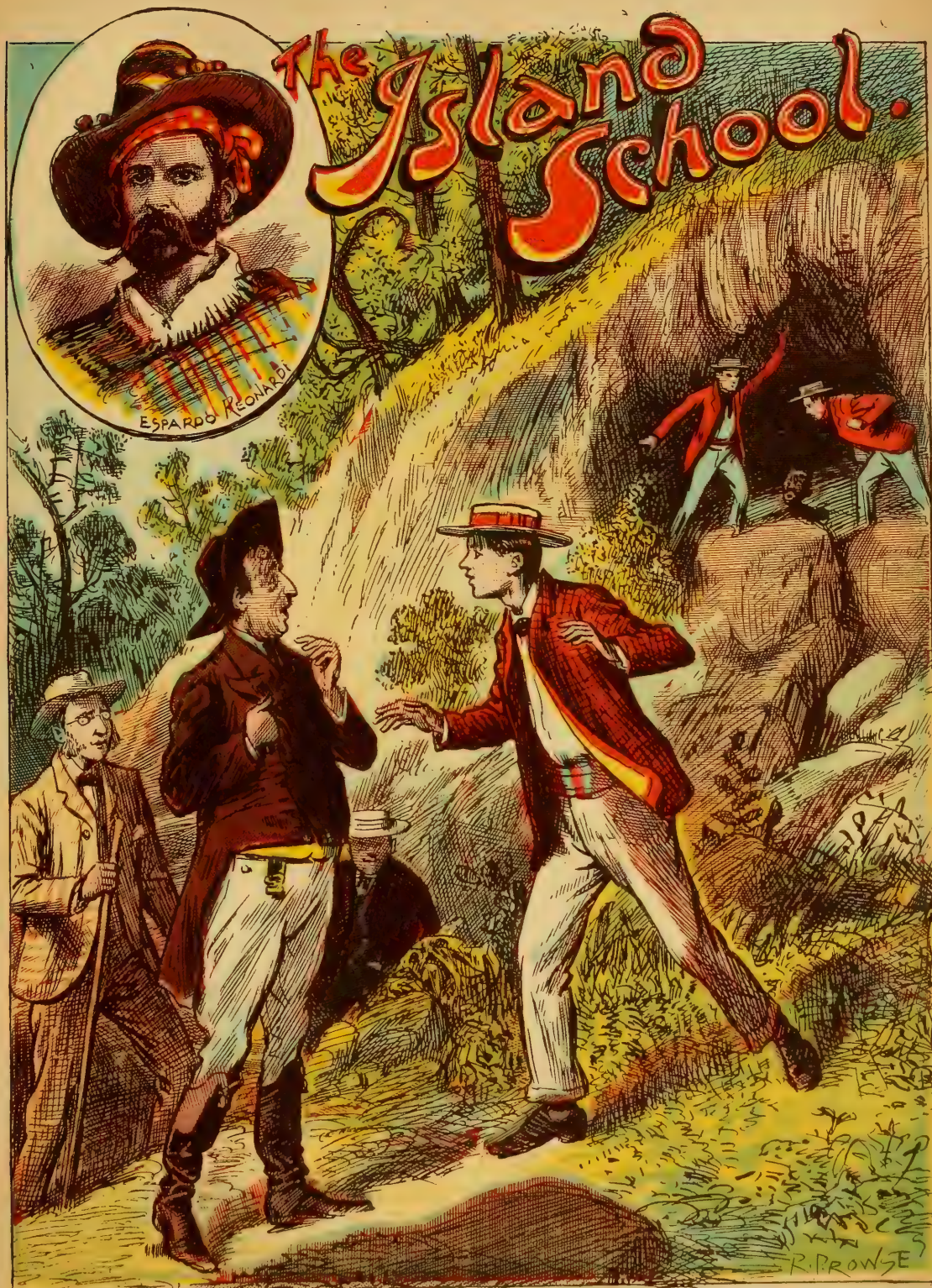
The shrubs near were broken, and some of the ferns were injured by passers to and fro. It was here also that Romeo put his best leg foremost and hurried by.

The chine was passed and the farm ground reached. Romeo put down the baskets and wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his jacket.

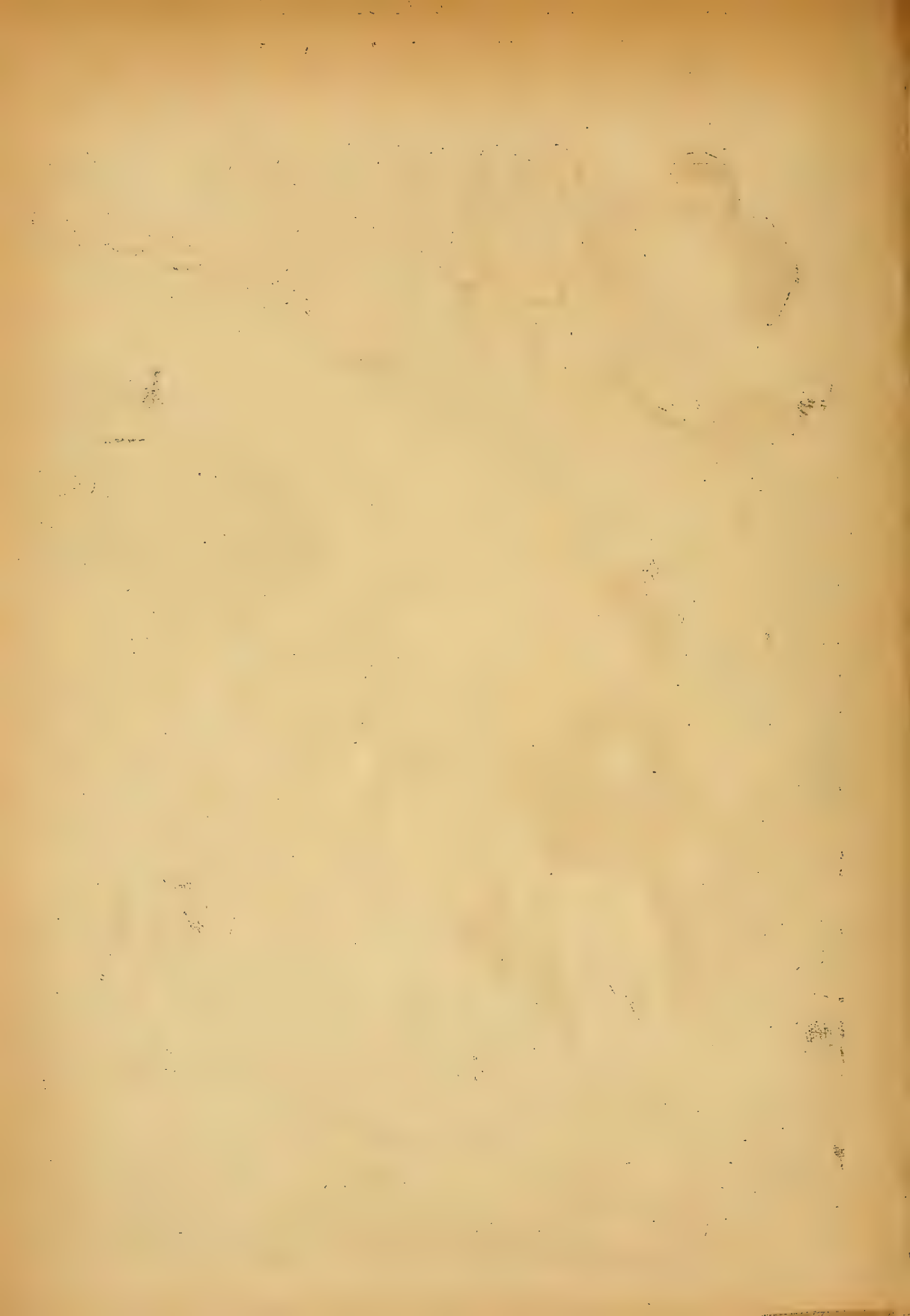
"Gorysmash!" he exclaimed, "it am berry warm work comin' trough dat chine. Jes' like a oven it am, sure."

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By **E. HARCOURT BURRAGE**, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



"What is it?" asked Mr. Farren, as Brodie leapt down to the level near him. "A man's head—a **BLACK MAN'S!** sticking out of the ground, sir!"



"Get to work and fill the baskets," said Gordon.
 "What is wanted?"

"Carrots, peas, and beans, mos'ly," said Romeo.

There was a sufficiency of these edibles for a small town, and Romeo went to work gathering each in turn. Jim walked away with Dawson until they were out of earshot.

"There is somebody in the chine," said Jim, "and Romeo knows it."

"I saw nothing," replied Dawson.

"They are there," said Jim, "but not many of them. Probably only two or three. We shall have to run the gauntlet of them going back, but I think we are pretty safe. It is not for us they are here."

"But what cheek!" exclaimed Dawson. "Surely if we spoke to Nap, they could be shunted out of the island?"

"Nap's no good," said Jim; "the man is a dufer. I say, just look here."

They were standing near a plot of land filled with potatoes. The haulm was withered, and they were ready for digging. On the earthed-up ridges there were deeply indented footsteps.

"See," said Jim, fitting his boot into one of them, "made by men, and with big loose boots upon their feet into the bargain."

"Ragged boots," said Dawson, drawing in his breath.

"Well, not boots at all," rejoined Jim, "but feet swathed in the odds and ends the poorer Spaniard wears. Let us follow them up."

They did so, and the tracks led them to an onion-bed, where there was very strong evidence of the recent visit of a marauder. Fully a peck of the esculent root had been pulled up and taken away.

"Next to the original garlic," said Jim, grimly, "the Spaniard loves the onion. It is to him what absinthe is to a Frenchman, opium to the Chinaman."

"From that remark I may deduct the opinion that Spaniards are in hiding."

Jim nodded, and said, "In the chine."

"There cannot be many of them."

"Half a dozen at the outside, but armed, you may reckon, old man."

"Still, half a dozen, armed or not, ought to be made to yield to numbers."

"I doubt," said Jim, "if we have much fighting stuff among us. Martin could be relied on, and Rob Changeling, but as for the rest"—Jim snapped his fingers—"they were not engaged by Nap to fight, and won't do it."

"And we boys are not strong enough."

"With a free hand I could gather sufficient help to get at these fellows, but that I haven't got. I see that Romeo has his baskets full. What a deuce of a hurry he is in! But we ought to be getting back."

Romeo had filled the baskets—two to the top with the heavier vegetables, the third about two-thirds full of the lighter material.

The latter he took possession of, and hoisting it upon his shoulders, prepared to lead the way home.

"Stop a minute, Romeo," said Jim.

"Whar de marrer now?" asked Romeo.

"Dawson," said Jim, "change baskets with Romeo."

Romeo seemed disposed to resist, but Dawson shifted the basket from his shoulders and pointed to his own.

"Dere a sprain in my arm," groaned Romeo, "jes' above de elber."

"Get your friends in the chine to help you," said Jim, coolly.

The eyes of Romeo fairly bulged out of his head. He stared at Jim as if he had hurled a thunderbolt at him.

"Me got frens in chine?" he gasped. "Cur's frens dem. Whar you seen dem?"

"How many are there?" asked Jim.

"Me spect dere was six or seven when me see em fust. But pussons dat say dey bile you and cut your nose and ears orf if you speak ob dem am squeer frens. Whar de frenship in dem, me like to know?"

"So you admit there are seven of them?" said Jim.

"Habin' taken de oaf not to mention dem," returned Romeo, with an air of immovable rectitude, "me not swar to de recise number. But dere am not one ober—nor," he added, after a pause, given to meditation, "nor mebbe one under."

Jim could have smiled at Romeo's style of giving information he had sworn under threats not to reveal, but for the serious nature of it. It was now clear that there were possibly seven men in hiding in the chine, and to them must be attributed the murder of the undermaster.

"Let us get back with all speed," said Jim, in an undertone.

He picked up his basket and strode on ahead. Dawson followed, and Romeo, notwithstanding the injured condition of his arm, hoisted up the heavier burden and trotted after them.

In this order they re-entered the chine, and passed through it unharmed.

They saw nothing; but above them, ensconced among the ferns, which Jim had previously observed had been disturbed, a young Spaniard was lying at full length, watching them through some of the coarse grass that fringed the projecting ledge of earth.

He had a rifle in his hand, which he pointed, first at Jim and then at Dawson, but he did not fire. It was an old single-barrelled weapon, with a very long barrel of the Moorish pattern.

"No," he said. "Of what avail is it to kill one, and leave the other free to fly and give the alarm? One

folly has already been done in killing the old man, who was not to be terrified into playing the traitor by admitting us into the school at night. Pah! How true to what they call honour are these English, even to the meanest of them! Now, if these dogs of mine had been here, we might have bagged the three; but let them go. What are two boys and a negro?"

He kept on muttering to himself until the trio were out of sight, and then, rising to his feet, climbed up to the higher land and gazed seaward.

The sun was low, but there was plenty of strong daylight yet. The view was as clear as it had been at noonday.

Far away, near the horizon, in an easterly direction, was the sail of a felucca, with its prow pointed towards the island.

He watched it for a few minutes, as if to make sure of its identity. Having done so, he returned to the ledge below, and lighting a cigar, squatted on his haunches, smoking and wrapt in deep thought.

He was a perfect type of his people—handsome, as the tiger is, showing the latent ferocity of his nature even in his quiet mood. His dark eyes, dim with some pleasing thought, rested on the bottom of the chine, moving slowly here and there, and yet seeing little of what he looked upon, for his thoughts were elsewhere.

So he remained for an hour or more, only shifting once or twice when he selected another cigar from a silken case he carried in the inner pocket of his short velvet jacket.

By-and-by the sun sank low, dipped under the horizon, and twilight descended to the earth.

Then he arose and went down to the beach, first casting a glance in the direction of the school, which, however, was hidden from view.

There was a long stretch of the beach between to look upon, but it was free of all human beings, and he boldly turned his steps to Silver Bay.

He reached and crossed it, and by that time it was almost dark. There were twinkling stars in the east, and the sea had lost its luminosity, looking dark and sullen as it heaved and fell.

There is little or no tide in the Mediterranean, which gives it a placidity unknown to other seas. There is no contending with the wind and outgoing or incoming water.

The softest of breezes was blowing, and a felucca, with its sail furled, was just then gently grounding on the beach.

CHAPTER XIV.

ESPARDO REONARDO AND HIS MEN.



HE had timed his coming to a nicety, and sauntering up, was received by the men in the boat with the deference due to a superior.

There were six of them, and they doffed their caps as they leaped upon the shore. Five of their number proceeded to haul up the boat, and the sixth advanced to the leader.

"So you have returned alone, Matello?" said the latter.

"Senor," was the reply, "Giuseppe is from home. He is on his way to Gibraltar for a run with a cargo of Moorish goods."

"Curse him!" muttered the chief. "Could he not leave his smuggling for awhile at *my* bidding? Does he forget that I am Espardo Reonardo?"

"He could not forget it, senor, but he was looked for on the Rock. All was prepared by our friends on the mainland, and to disappoint them once might be fatal to his future trading. We may look for him in a few days—in a week at the outside."

"A week—it is too long."

They turned away in the direction of the chine, leaving the other men to follow at their leisure.

"Did you deliver my message to the Senorita Lucia?" inquired Reonardo.

"I could not, senor. The lady was not at home, but away at sea in her own felucca. She left within a few hours of your departure, and had not returned."

"What mad trick is she up to now?" muttered the chief.

"The senor will remember that the senorita is skilful, and there is no fear of disaster. It has often been her whim to spend a few days on the open sea."

"She has too many whims," muttered Reonardo, with a smothered oath; "they will one day grow wearisome. Surely she has no inkling of our coming here?"

"Who was to inform her, senor?"

"How can I tell? I have so many traitors and fools around me. But, Matello, it is of serious import that Giuseppe is not available with his twenty men. There must be a feeling of alarm in yonder school-house, although they know not who has struck the blow. It was my hot Spanish blood that led me to take a false step, but it need not be a fatal one."

"Why should we wait?" asked Matello. "A raid on the house at night, and the thing is done. What are

boys to men, even though they be counted by the hundred?"

"What is a nest of wasps to the man who disturbs them?" asked Espardo Reonardo. "You talk idly and rashly, according to your habit. No, we must wait and make sure that no communication, no appeal for help, is sent from here. I have a plan whereby all will be at my mercy. We will talk it over to-night. Lucia away, you say," he added, changing the subject. "I like it not."

"Is it a new thing for her to do as she pleases, senior?"

"No; but of late she has been restless and wayward. She has shown, alternately, love too strong and anger that leads her to say biting things."

"All beautiful women are wayward," said Matello; "they know their power over us. There was a time when her pretty wilfulness amused the senior."

"I am weary of it now," was the curt response.

They crossed the beach of the Silver Bay, and reached the chine. By that time the sky was filled with stars, and the stillness of night upon the scene. The mouth of the chine yawned like the entrance to a dark cavern. It required good eyes to pick their way through it.

But they had good eyes, and were men accustomed to nightwork. As they entered the dark and narrow way, they heard the footsteps of the rest of the men, and lingering somewhat, allowed them to come up.

Each of the men bore a burden, a package or a small cask of wine, and together they proceeded in silence. Espardo Reonardo made no further reference to the subject of his recent conversation with Matello.

He was moody, thoughtful, and evidently disappointed. The feeling must have found an echo in the breasts of his men, for they were silent. They arrived at the foot of the ledge, which was steep climbing, and all but two ascended, leaving the packages below. Arriving at the summit, one of their number passed through the ferns to a cave at the back and brought out a rope, which was lowered to those below.

With the aid of it, the produce they had brought with them was hauled up and carried into the cave.

A lantern was then lighted, and by its glare it was revealed that all the men were of the lower type of the ruffian Spaniard, save Reonardo and Matello.

The latter was a smart, handsome man of forty, who had served in the arena as a matador, but, being unable to attain eminence in the bull-fight, had wearied of the work, and taken to other callings, more or less questionable.

All the men were armed with knives and revolvers. The rifle of their chief was the solitary weapon of that class in their possession.

One of the bales was opened, and it proved to be filled with provisions—Spanish sausage, garlic, bread, and so on.

There were two small casks of wine, one of which was tapped, and drink served out in metal cups, which were already in the cave.

After the evening meal the men brought out cards and proceeded to indulge in the great passion of every Spaniard—gambling. Reonardo and Matello sauntered out, and, with cigars between their lips, sat down near the spot where the former had passed the earlier hours of the day.

CHAPTER XV.

OLD CHORKER GOES WRONG AT SEA.



THE idea of building forts was taken up with enthusiasm. Even the youngest boys in the school entered into it, much as they would have done at home in the winter when the snow was about. It was, in short, looked upon by them as a bit of fun.

Nor did the masters accept it in a serious light, not knowing what was in the minds of the promoters—Jim Gordon and Bob Morse.

The morrow happened to be Mrs. Farrell's birthday, which was a day of some importance to the boys, as Napoleon had decided that his consort's natal anniversary should be signalled as a general holiday.

Early in the morning a deputation of the pupils, headed by Lawrence Terry, who made a good spokesman, waited upon her in the private dining-room of the schoolmaster, and wished her, in the name of all the school, many happy returns of the day. In addition, she was presented with a big basket of flowers gathered from the shore of the lagoon.

Having graciously accepted the good wishes and the flowers, she announced that the day was to be a holiday, as it had been before, but on that occasion they were not to stray far away from the school.

Mr. Farrell and Eveline were witnesses of the ceremony. The schoolmaster nervously added that it would be better perhaps if the boys all kept together.

"We intend to give the day to beginning the building of the two forts designed by Morse, sir," replied Terry, "and Gordon wishes to know if we may cut down some of the young pines in the wood behind the castle?"

"I leave you to do what you please," replied Mr. Farrell, "only do not get into mischief."

Terry assured him that it was about the last thing

they would think of, and the deputation bowed themselves out of the room.

This was just before breakfast, but for more than an hour previous Jim and Morse had been busy arranging for the beginning of their proposed work.

All the available spades, pickaxes, hatchets, saws, rope for hauling down timber, and other things needful, were being hunted up, the whole school assisting, save a few who were in the post-office preparing the mail-bags for departure.

Chorker was cleaning up the felucca with the other men around him. They were all to have an idle day.

"Why not make a pleasure-party of it?" suggested Martin. "A blow at sea will do us all good. The boat can carry the lot."

"What she can carry, and what she is agoin' to take," replied Chorker, "are two different things."

"Do you mean to say you are going alone?" asked Martin.

"I does," answered Chorker.

"Take me, anyway," pathetically suggested Rob Changeling, grinning all over his face.

"I'd as soon take a bag o' pison with me," grunted Chorker. "Once for all, I goes alone. Now, then, gi' me room to twist my mop."

They gave him room, to avoid a sprinkling, and after some remarks about his being an old curmudgeon, and other equally objectionable things, they left him alone with Rob Changeling.

"Chorker," said Rob, "yon don't improve in temper anyways. Why couldn't you have made a party on it?"

"Because it's real business," replied Chorker; "the mail-boat people would think I was a-giving you a sail at thruppence a head. Besides, I prefers your room to your company."

"Well," said Rob, "if I was of your dispersion, I'd ask somebody to tie a hundredweight of iron to my feet, and sink me in five fathoms of water. I had a dream about you last night."

"Jigger your dreams!" growled Chorker.

"You was jiggered in my dream, if that is any comfort to you," said Rob Changeling. "A nice mess you were in!"

"I don't want to hear nothin' about it."

"You was in the hands of pirates——"

"Dreams is all lies—derlusions."

"And tied neck and heels together, and left——"

Old Chorker picked up his mop and whirled it threateningly over his head.

"Go and tell your dreams to them as believes in 'em!" he roared. "What do you take me for—a baby?"

"Well," said Rob, "I thowt I'd tell you, for when I dreams as I did last night, the *things come true*."

Whistling softly, he walked away, leaving Chorker troubled, in spite of himself. He always professed not to be in the least superstitious, but he was like most people, he could not help thinking there was something in certain signs and omens—and, perhaps, dreams.

On the whole, he was sorry now that he was going alone, and yet what a foolish idea it was to talk about pirates in the Mediterranean! Who had ever heard of such a thing?

"The idjot," muttered Chorker, "is allus trying to skeer me. But I ain't the man to be took in with his dreams."

The summons to breakfast soon turned his thoughts into a more agreeable channel, and having the felucca now in readiness for sea, he hastened indoors with the throng.

There was an all-round disposition to hurry over the meal, so as to make the most of the day ahead. Even Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo were on their mettle, and performed their wonted duties with more than usual alacrity and despatch.

They were stimulated thereto by the prospect of a half-holiday for themselves.

In the afternoon, "if they were good"—Mrs. Farrell put it that way—they would be allowed to go out and assist the boys. She and her husband and daughter would also be there—looking on. In short, the whole house would be out enjoying themselves. A rough kind of tea was to be served in the open air.

Breakfast over, the boys were off, with Morse and Jim Gordon at their head, and in a few minutes they were marching up the path in the direction of the castle, some with pickaxes on their shoulders, others with spades, and all—or nearly all—carrying some of the other requisites.

Martin and the men—Chorker alone excepted—followed at their leisure, and took their seats upon the bridge of the castle, or on convenient places, where they could obtain a view of the proceedings.

Morse and Jim had their plans ready.

On the left-hand side of the castle, on a level patch of ground a short distance below the old building, a fort, shaped on the Redan principle, was to be made.

It may briefly be likened to a straight line of moderate length, with two wedge-shaped projections from it.

In front they proposed to fix a sloping stockade of pine, each piece of timber to have a pointed top.

In this position, chosen with the eye of a general, the approach from below was well covered, and an assaulting party under fire would have hot work cut out for them.

On the other side of the castle, and nearly on the same level, the fort was to be on the principle of an

old Roman camp, circular in form, and protected outside by a ditch and another stockade of timber.

Each member of the Council of Ten had a number of boys under him, and each gang had its apportioned labour to perform.

Adam Steene undertook the supervision of cutting down suitable trees; Dawson and his boys were the haulers; Rainstone and his assistants cut the trunks into suitable lengths, and so on right through all had appointed work to do.

Morse and Gordon each undertook the superintending of a fort—Morse that of the Redan, Jim that of the Roman fort.

The first thing was the marking out of the forts, which was done by the leaders, and then the sappers went to work, with coats and waistcoats off, and shirtsleeves rolled up to their elbows.

The sounds of pick and saw and cheery voices filled the air around, and floated seawards.

Presently the few boys who had remained to assist with the mail-bags and help Chorker to get away, came hurrying up, and reported that the old man had gone, grumbling because nobody would go with him.

He wanted the boys badly to accompany him, but they declined. The fun of fort-building was more to their taste.

When people work for pleasure they usually work with a will, and in an hour the boys with the pick and spade had cut out the lines of the two forts. Then they went to work making the ditches, throwing up the earth which was to form the protecting parapets.

But work as they might, the morning could not do more than give the faintest outline of what was intended to unpractised eyes.

But Martin saw what was being aimed at, and it met with his entire approval.

"One or both those boys," he said, more than once, "have got a head."

Just before noon Mr. Groby, accompanied by the two other undermasters, came up by the path to see how the boys were getting on. The respective names of the latter were Turner and Storeby. The position they filled in the school was that of general teachers. Both were quiet men, without much peculiarity of character. Still, they had their especial ways and gifts, as we shall presently see.

"Well, Morse," said Mr. Groby, "you seem to be busy here."

"I want the work done as soon as possible, sir," replied Morse.

"I do not approve of war, even in play," said Mr. Storeby. He was not more than twenty-six, and remarkably solemn for his years.

"Indeed, sir," exclaimed Morse, "why not?"

"Peace should be cultivated by the monarchs of the earth. It ought to be enforced."

"How, sir?" asked Morse, in his quiet way.

"Why, by—by——" Mr. Storeby paused, completely puzzled to say how, unless he admitted that by force—in other words by war—peace ought to be insisted on.

There was some silent laughter at the expense of the undermaster, as the boys tripped down to the lower ground when the dinner-hour drew near. At the foot of the pathway they met Mr. Farrell, who wanted to know if they had seen anything of the felucca from the higher ground.

It turned out that nobody had taken the trouble to look for it, nor had the smoke of a steamer, the expected mail-boat, been observed.

"He ought to be back," said Mr. Farrell, uneasily. "Chorker is a first-rate seaman. He cannot have met with an accident, I trust."

"There is no certainty of the mail-boat within a few hours, sir," said Gordon. "I was out half the day the last time I went to meet it."

"So you were," said the schoolmaster, brightening. "Perhaps Chorker will be back soon."

But the dinner passed over, and he had not returned.

Owing to the position of the schoolhouse, a view of the sea in front could not be obtained. It was cut off by the line of rocks on the other side of the lagoon.

But as Mr. Farrell again expressed his uneasiness about Chorker, Jim Gordon volunteered to take a rowing-boat and go down to the mouth of the estuary. From there they could see something of the felucca unless something had gone wrong with it.

While they were gone, the rest could betake themselves to the region of the castle as originally arranged.

With Lal Brodie and Stiff as oarsmen, Jim was soon off, and those left behind lost no time in getting away.

Twenty minutes afterwards the schoolhouse was closed, and there was a long string of humanity toiling up the narrow path, with Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo, laden with sundries for tea, bringing up the rear.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SERIOUS ROBBERY.



O you think anything has happened to Old Chorker?" asked Lal Brodie.

Jim did not reply at the moment, for he was thinking. Presently he said:

"He ought to have been back, barring accidents, by twelve o'clock. Although I talked about the mail being late, I have rarely known

it so when the boat is a British one. It is the Spaniards who are such crawlers."

"Chorker isn't much of a seaman," said Stiff, "for all his brag."

"A child ought to be able to manage a boat in this weather," replied Jim. "Easy all!"

The oarsmen stopped rowing as the mouth of the estuary was reached. Jim dropped the rudder-lines, and stood up in the boat.

He had brought with him a field-glass, which was provided for the use of those who desired it, when at sea, to look out for the mail-boat.

At first it appeared that there was no vessel of any description in sight. With the naked eye none were visible.

"The felucca isn't about," said Lal, anxiously.

"I see nothing," muttered Jim; "it is odd. But stop a moment. There is a speck near the horizon eastward. It is a boat with a bare mast."

"The felucca!" exclaimed Stiff.

"Impossible to say at this distance. If it is, why is the sail not set?"

"Old Chorker may have made a mess of it somehow."

"On my word," said Jim, "I begin to think that the old sinner has got into some sort of trouble. Now, boys, there are six miles of pulling ahead, if we are to see what boat that is. Do you feel as if you could do it?"

"Fit for sixty, cap," said Lal, saluting, and Stiff said something to the same effect.

"Pull away, then," said Jim; "the mail-boat has gone for a certainty. There is not a vestige of smoke around the horizon, as there would have been if she had been coming or going any time within the last two hours."

The boys bent to the oars, and the boat shot into the open sea. In so frail a bark—they had purposely selected one of the lightest boats to get to the mouth of the estuary quickly—few would have cared to put to sea, unless in a calm.

There was not a stiff breeze blowing, but there was sufficient wind, to raise waves of moderate size. Good steering was requisite, and that was why Jim left the rowing entirely to his companions. He would not, in that boat, trust the rudder-lines to any hands but his own.

On went the boat, Jim keeping the stem well on to meet the rolling waves, and it bobbed up and down like a cork. Lal and Stiff had to keep their eyes open to prevent crab-catching, which might have upset the tiny craft.

Stripped to their shirts they pulled on steadily, without any signs of flagging. Jim kept his eyes ahead, and very little talking went on. Suddenly he burst out with an exclamation of dismay. The

rowers raised their heads, and looked at him inquiringly.

"It is the felucca," he said; "she is not more than half a mile away now, and I know the cut of her jib. She seems to me to be slowly drifting east before the wind."

"Old Chorker has fallen overboard!" suggested Lal Brodie.

"Something has happened to him," responded Jim. "Pull away. Sorry I can't take my turn, but the water is lumpy out here. This cockleshell wouldn't stand being brought broadside to the waves. By Jingo! there is something alive in the felucca. It keeps rising up above the gunwale. It's a hand! No, it isn't! It is a *foot*!"

"That's a licker!" exclaimed Brodie.

"Pull away!" said Jim.

The rowers obeyed him, almost as fresh in their energy as if they had just started. Jim said no more until he was within a few feet of the felucca, which was drifting helplessly out to sea.

The foot he had previously observed had not shown itself since, but now it again appeared rising above the side of the craft with a convulsive movement. It was not difficult to recognise the thick-set, stumpy pedal extremity of Chorker.

"Easy, ship oars!" cried Jim; "lay hold of her, Stiff."

They were alongside now, and as they grasped the felucca's gunwale, Jim looked over and saw the lower part of Chorker's body in a state of agitation. The upper portion was concealed by the sail of the felucca being tumbled down on the top of him.

At another time Jim would have laughed, but he feared now that something serious had happened.

"Get aboard," he said, briefly, "and make the boat fast astern."

Springing lightly into the felucca, he rolled back the sail and discovered Chorker, gagged, and with his arms bound. He was also secured by a rope to the forward seat, and with the exception of his legs, was unable to move.

His eyes were almost out of his head, and the general expression of his face was that of overwhelming terror.

Apparently he did not know Jim, for there was no recognition in his eyes. Stiff and Brodie had meanwhile secured the boat astern, and came forward to lend assistance. Between them they removed the old man's bonds and raised him into a sitting position.

"He's got a flask or a flat bottle in his pocket," said Lal, tapping his jacket.

"Out with it," replied Jim Gordon. "I hope there is something in it, for he seems to want it."

It was an ordinary flat bottle, such as publicans give out to their customers. It was about half-full of a

dark-brown liquid, which Lal, on smelling it, declared to be rum.

They put the mouth of the bottle to the lips of Chorker, and with a mechanical movement they parted.

Lal poured some of the liquid into his mouth, and it went down his throat, as Stiff declared, "as naturally as possible."

This stimulant brought back some of the scattered wits of the old man, who turned his eyes from one to the other and slowly recognised them."

"Bless yer, boys, fer coming," he said, huskily, "I've been nearly as dead as Phairy."

"Who's been aboard of you?" asked Jim.

"A lot o' warmints," answered Chorker.

"That goes without saying, seeing how they treated you. Who were they?"

"Blest if I know. The cut of their jibs was Spanish, and they tuk the mail-bags——"

"Took our mails?"

"That they did," said Chorker. "They was in a biggish boat, that overhauled me in no time. I didn't expeck any mischief until they was within a few yards on me, going on the same line side by side. Then up jumps one with a gun, that looked to me to be about twelve feet long, and he p'inted it straight at my head, saying something in a lingo I couldn't understand. But it was a haction that made his meanin' clear. It meant, if I didn't heave to he'd blow my brains out. Give us another drop out of that bottle."

He looked as if he wanted it, so it was administered to him, and he resumed his story.

"I brought the boat dead up in the eye of the wind, and they came aboard, three on 'em. They knocked me down, tied me up as you found me, and then chucks the mails-bags inter their boat. Then they drops the felucca sail right atop of me and goes away."

"What time was this?" asked Jim.

"About eleven, I reckon, as near as I can guess. I warn't above two mile off the shore at the time, for I was standing off and on easy like looking for the smoke of the steamer."

"Did you notice where the boat came from?"

"Not at the beginning; but it seemed, when I did spot it, to be coming from the island, somewhere on a line with Silver Bay."

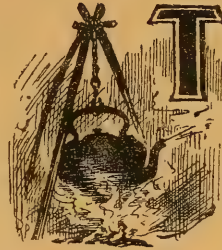
"We had better get back smart," said Jim, abruptly; "this is a thing that must be looked to. Give a hand with the sail. I'll run the felucca home."

The felucca grounded on the shore, and the boys springing out, hauled it up, so as to make it secure against drifting.

Old Chorker went stumping on in the direction of the schoolhouse, and the boys, full of their portentous tidings, sped upward towards the castle.

CHAPTER XVII.

BOXED UP ON THE ISLAND.



THEY were all very merry by the castle when the boys and Chorker appeared. Apparently their absence had not been observed.

It was past four, and the three niggers, having lighted a fire, were boiling some water for tea-making. The schoolmaster, looking brighter than Jim had seen him for days, was lying on the sward near his wife and daughter, with whom he was chatting.

The other masters were near, occasionally joining in the conversation.

On the battlements of the old castle, Martin, Sleery, and others of the men, including Rob Changeling, were seen lounging by the wall with their pipes in full blast. Below, the boys were resting from their labours, gathered in groups, exchanging jests or sarcasms, according to their dispositions, as they resumed their upper clothing.

Morse was inspecting the work done with the gravity of a full-blown foreman, but on espying Jim he went forward to greet him.

"Where have you been?" he asked. "What's wrong? I can see you have something to tell."

"Chorker has been robbed of the mail-bags," replied Jim, in an undertone. "Don't make any fuss about it as yet. I must see Nap. Lal and Stiff, you keep mum for a bit over the lost bags."

"All right," was the reply.

"Come with me, Morse," said Jim; "it seems a pity to upset Nap. He looks happy for a change. But it must be done."

"Do you propose to suggest anything to him?"

"Yes. You will hear what it is when I put it to him. Back me up."

Morse nodded assent, and Jim, presenting himself before the schoolmaster, doffed his cap to the ladies.

"Come back, sir," he said.

"I was certain—at least, I have been so during the last hour—that nothing could have gone wrong. I saw the felucca returning with your boat in tow. My daughter Eveline pointed it out to me from the point yonder."

"There is something I should like to show you, sir," said Jim. "It cannot be seen from here. If you would not mind coming up to the battlements of the castle it will be clearly visible."

"Will not after tea do?" asked the schoolmaster, lazily.

"Tea will not be ready for half an hour," said

Eveline, looking at Jim. "You have plenty of time to go up and back again, and a little exercise will do you good."

He, in his way, loved his daughter, and a suggestion from her was always enough.

"Very well, Eveline dear," he said, "if you think I want a little exercise I will take it."

Accompanied by Jim and Morse the schoolmaster crossed the bridge, but, instead of going up to the battlements, Jim halted in the covered way just beyond the old portcullis.

"I am sorry to disturb you, sir," said Jim, "but something of the utmost importance has happened."

"What new terror have you to tell me, Gordon?" exclaimed Mr. Farrell. "Another murder?"

"No, sir. Still, it is serious. The mail-bags have been stolen!"

"The—mail-bags—stolen?"

"Yes, sir. Chorker was stopped at sea, and the bags were taken from him."

Jim told the rest of the story, which the schoolmaster listened to with a troubled face. The news was very serious.

"I wrote for assistance," he murmured, more to himself than to the boys, "and now it will be impossible to get it."

"You forget the launch, sir," said Jim, eagerly. "Changeling can get it ready for sea in two hours. She would make the run to Gibraltar in a day and a night, for she is a speedy little craft. One of us, or more, say Morse and myself, could visit the governor of Gibraltar and get the help you want."

"You are right, Gordon," said Mr. Farrell; "that is the advice of a clear-headed boy."

"And might I advise for the thing to be done quietly?" said Morse. "Changeling is here on the battlements. A word will send him off to look to the launch."

They left the schoolmaster pacing to and fro, weighing the *pros* and *cons* of the situation, which was certainly serious. He believed that he knew more about this enemy that was harassing him, and to an extent he did. But his knowledge of Espardo Reonardo was not that possessed by Jim and Morse, and comparing of notes might have been advantageous to both.

But it was not done. The schoolmaster kept his knowledge to himself, and naturally the boys did not like to ask to be confided in by their senior.

"He is of no more good in an emergency," said Jim, as he scaled the staircase leading to the battlements of the castle, "than a new-born baby. He is the Napoleon of incompetence."

He found the men above in the full enjoyment of their tobacco and the view before them. It certainly was magnificent. They, too, had seen the felucca

returning, and asked Jim why Old Chorker had been so long at sea.

"Got into a mess with the canvas," lightly explained Jim; "but he is allright now. Rob, I want you to help below."

"All right," said Rob. "What is it? To cut the bread-and-butter? I ain't no hand at cutting it thin. All my life I've been given to cutting it in chunks."

"It is not the bread-and-butter," said Jim, "but something you can do to perfection."

He turned away and descended the stairs, followed by Rob Changeling.

Not a word was said until they were below. By that time the schoolmaster had rejoined his wife and Eveline.

"Rob," said Jim, "you must get the launch ready for sea."

"Good heavens! what for?"

"Something is wrong," said Jim. "Morse and myself will go with you—to Gibraltar. Now get off quietly, and in ten minutes I'll follow you."

"I wish, Master Gordon, you would let me know what's up."

"Well, Chorker's lost the mail-bags, and we have to report it and the murder of Mr. Stebbing at Gibraltar."

"I begin to think," said Rob, "that it was time we was off this 'ere island, unless we have a change of governors. Why! that Mr. Farrell is nobody—jest nobody—when there is anything gone wrong."

"All right, Rob, we know that," said Jim. "Now away you go. I won't be many minutes after you."

Rob disappeared, and Jim, strolling out after him, lingered about in a casual sort of way for ten minutes or so, and then taking advantage of a favourable opportunity, followed.

Half-way down the path he found Morse awaiting him, and they descended together. There was not the least doubt in the minds of either of who the robber of the mail-bags was. It was pretty certain that it was done by the same hands that killed the undermaster.

They were now near the level ground, where they could see the launch lying at anchor. To their surprise, they saw Rob on board, violently gesticulating to them.

"Something else gone wrong," muttered Jim.

They ran down to the shore, and jumping into a small boat, pulled up to the side of the launch.

Rob Changeling, leaning over the side, with the perspiration bursting from his forehead, said, hoarsely:

"We can't steam to-night, nor to-morrow, nor the next day!"

"Why not?" exclaimed Jim, aghast.

"Somebody come aboard," explained Rob—"I reckon it was last night, when we were all asleep—"

and got into the engine-room. They've druv bits of iron among the cogs and inter other parts of the engine. It will take a week fur me to drill 'em out and to get the engine in order again."

"We are boxed up on the island, by Jove!" exclaimed Morse.

"That's so," said Jim, drearily. "All right, Rob. Get to work as soon as you can. We must put off our little trip for a week."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FOE IN THE CHINE.



crisis was at hand. Both the boys saw it was so, and there was on them both a settled conviction that something must be done, otherwise they must be prepared to lose all—their very lives, perhaps—to the cunning foe hidden in the chine.

"The stealing of our letters keeps the condition of things hidden from our friends; the injury to the engine of the launch prevents our leaving the island."

Thus spake Jim Gordon, and in his heart there was a feeling bordering on terror—not for himself so much as on account of others.

Morse did not answer him for a moment. He was calculating the odds against them in the fashion of his methodical mind.

"Jim," he said, "I wonder if those fellows could be scared away?"

"Who is to scare them?" asked Jim.

"It think I could do it," said Morse, "if I could only get at them."

"What is your idea?" asked Jim.

"Improved melenite," was the somewhat vague reply.

"I think if you could put it near enough," said Jim, "it would scare them from the island and lift them half-way to the stars. For my part, I don't see that we need be too punctilious in getting at those wretches. They murdered Stebbing."

"I would rather frighten than kill—at present," answered Morse. "We are awfully young to go blowing up men wholesale. Of course, if we were attacked, and killed our man in fair fight, it would be a different thing. You go on to the house. I am off to see if they are still there."

"What! go prowling into the chine in daylight? That would be madness."

"I am not going into the chine," said Morse.

He waved his hand as a signal for his companion not to accompany him, and breaking into a trot, hastened off in the direction of the chine. Jim called for him to come back, but getting no answer, let him go.

He was inclined to follow him, but knowing Morse was neither rash nor foolish in anything he did, he gave up the idea and went on to the house.

Nobody, of course, had as yet returned, and he went round to the back to see if Chorker was visible. The window of the scullery was open.

It was, as most sculleries are, rather dirty and in a sloppy condition. Opposite the window was a door, beyond that a passage, and at the end of it the kitchen.

Jim knew the geography of the place well, although he had rarely been there. Occasionally, in days gone by, the boys had in small parties invaded the domestic retreats to play practical jokes on one or all the trio of niggers, and that was how Jim knew the place. Opening the door, he saw, to his utter amazement, Old Chorker lying at full length, with the upper part of his body enveloped in a dirty sack.

This time his legs were secured, and he was entirely helpless. He could not even kick signals of distress.

Jim lost no time in cutting the cords that bound him, first taking note of the fact that they were tied by a skilled hand at the business. Then he pulled off the sack, and saw that the arms of this unfortunate old man were securely lashed to his body.

"Why, Chorker," he said, "who played this joke upon you?"

"Joke, do you call it?" almost howled the old man. "Is it a joke to come up behind a man, give him a whack under the ear, knock him down flat, and then do this—*this*—to him?"

"Then you didn't get anything to eat?" said Jim.

"Me? No! Could you eat trussed like an old rooster, and with your head in a sack?" was the fierce question. "Now, young Gordon, don't you come the innercent with me. I knows you, and I knows them as was with you, and I'll have you to know——"

"Pshaw!" angrily interrupted Jim; "do you think we had any hand in it?"

Chorker climbed back through the window, and Jim followed. He wisely reflected that he had no right to go prowling about the house, and, apart from the fact that if a foe were there it would be exceedingly perilous, he had no warranty for doing it.

His motive, too, might be misinterpreted.

Old Chorker was making for the pathway to the castle, and Jim, keeping him in sight, went that way too. He was not sure what steps the old man would take, and was getting indifferent on the matter. It was certain that now all must come out, and perhaps it would be just as well.

Tea was being handed round by that time, a number of the boys waiting on the rest as they reclined in picturesque groups upon the ground. The principal, with his wife, Eveline, and the masters, sat near the bridge, and Chorker worked his way towards them.

Chorker, glaring about, looked around for a spot where he could sit down and obtain the peace he was sorely in need of. But almost every foot of the space in front of the castle was occupied, and there was no spot on which he could comfortably rest his weary bones.

"Sit down here, Mr. Chorker," sang out Terry, pointing to a place where there was a stone with a very acute pyramid-like top to rest upon; "I am sure you must be tired."

"Romeo," said Chorker, "gimme some tea and bread-and-butter—thick. I'm famishing."

He dropped down where he was, within easy hail of the schoolmaster, and Jim came and took a seat near him.

"Where's Morse," asked Terry, looking round, "your inseparable pal, Jim?"

"He will be here directly," answered Jim.

There was much noise and rollicking laughter, and Jim, as he ate his tea, reflected sadly on the possibility of their mirth ere long being turned to tears.

There were a large number of the boys who were quite little fellows, of no use as assistant defenders in case of a fight, and whose fate would be especially hard if the enemy prevailed.

"What a thing it will be!" he thought. "Nap will have to answer for his blundering ere long, I reckon."

It was about ten minutes later when Morse was seen working his way through the group of boys, warding off a variety of questions with smiles and jests. He came over and sat down by the side of Jim.

"Still there," he said, in an undertone, "squatting in their hiding crib among the ferns, amusing themselves with reading our letters intended for home. I counted seven of them, all at work opening them. But only two appeared to be able to read. They were doing so aloud, translating as they went along."

"How did you manage to get near them?" asked Jim.

"I climbed up the face of the cliff and worked my way along the top of the chine, so that I got right above them. I have found a place that answers my purpose. To-night they will get the jumps. I shall want an assistant, and if you will come, I shall be glad."

"What time?"

"After the others are in bed. We must make a sneaking-out job of it."

As the groups were breaking up, and the boys moving freely about, they talked no more just then.

Some went up a tower of the castle, by the dark and winding ways. But there was a part of the castle shut off from them by a door being locked. It was that in which the chamber of council was. Jim had the key, a fact he kept to himself. The reason for this step, recently taken, will soon be apparent.

Eveline, endowed with the curiosity that was fatal to Mrs. Bluebeard the first and up to the sixth, wanted very much to get a peep at what lay beyond that door. But Jim resisted a strong temptation to oblige her, and walked away without responding. Happily for him, she did not know he was the custodian of the key.

Finally, as evening drew on, the whole party returned home, the majority satisfied with having spent a happy day.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MIDNIGHT EXPEDITION.



JIM and Morse slept in the same room with a number of others, and the hour for retiring was half-past nine. Most of the youngsters, tired with their day's work, were glad to get to bed, and were soon asleep. Jim, by using extraordinary control over

himself, managed to keep awake.

Morse, with his active mind, had no difficulty whatever about warding off sleep. Too often he had lain awake at night, working out some chemical problem in his mind. He was a born thinker, one who was bound, under ordinary circumstances, to come to the front by-and-by.

It was about a quarter to twelve when he slipped out of bed and obtained a light, not with an ordinary match, but by rubbing a piece of apparently plain paper on the floor. It was a new means of ignition, of his own invention.

He had provided himself with a candle, and by its light the two friends dressed, all but their shoes, which had been left below, to be cleaned in the morning. They had slippers in the room, of course, but, as they would be useless to them abroad, they left them behind.

Now, it so happened that night that Romeo was in a wakeful mood. As a rule, he and his progenitors were ready and sound sleepers, but on this night Romeo, for the life of him, could not get to sleep.

The reason for it was that Chorker had confided to him, and to him alone, the extraordinary adventure he had in the region of the scullery.

As this was the spot especially used by Romeo for

his daily labours, the narrative naturally troubled him.

Chorker clung to the opinion that he had been victimised by the boys. Romeo's mind turned to spirits. He was a firm, unswerving believer in ghosts.

He was also very superstitious about little things, and he was sure that he had raised some spectre by the doing of something wrong.

It was this sense of being guilty of a crime against the spectres generally that exercised his mind, and had much to do with his lying awake.

He slept near the door, being put there by his elders as the most uncomfortable part of the room. The door did not accurately fit, and there was always a draught round his head, which most people would have considered eminently uncomfortable.

As a rule, Romeo was impervious to such minor ills, but that night it worried him.

The whirr of the air became the whispering of spirits, and when the sound rose to a faint moan he raised the sound to the dignity of a groan of anguish, illustrative of a threatened violent end for somebody, most likely for himself.

But suddenly another sound fell upon his ear that fairly straightened out half the wool upon his head. It was that of soft footsteps on the stairs, and through the crack created by the ill-fitting of the door there came a gleam by light.

Now Romeo, for all his terror, had sufficient wit remaining to know that ghosts do not, as a rule, carry lighted lamps or candles about with them. It was therefore no spirit about the house at that unseemly hour.

Slipping out of bed, he applied his eye to the crack, and saw Jim Gordon and Morse coming downstairs.

"Gorysmash!" he muttered, "what dem young sinners up to at dis time?"

Romeo was curious by nature. He was a born investigator of other people's business. Given the opportunity of prying into affairs that did not concern him, and he could not resist it.

He rolled out of bed, and his apparel being of the simplest, he soon put on sufficient for him to get about in. With a pair of trousers and shirt he was prepared to travel through the world until he came to a more chilly clime.

With naked feet he slipped out of the room, and was in time to see the boys in the hall below, engaged in picking out their boots from the long rows laid out for cleaning, and putting them on.

That done, they walked to a window near the front door, and, unfastening it, raised the latch, and went out by climbing over the sill.

"Now what in de name ob marcy am dem young genelman up to?" thought Romeo.

On raising the window they had put out the light,

but it was summer-time, and there was no such thing as absolute darkness in the open air. With a clear sky and the stars shining, one could get about with ease. Romeo popped out of the window, just ten seconds after the two friends.

He saw they were hastening in the direction of the small building at the end of the schoolhouse out-houses, known as the laboratory. This place had always been to Romeo an abode of terrors.

He had heard of the chemical investigations conducted therein, and whatever of the terrible might be lacking in the description given by the boys of the materials stored therein, the imagination of Romeo supplied.

He firmly believed that some of the compounds could, if properly used, divide the earth in twain.

What did the pair want in that place so late?

Was Morse about to impart to Gordon some of the secrets of his discoveries?

If so, why should not Romeo also become possessed of them?

He had often longed to get hold of some of the secrets of explosive manufacture, mainly for the purpose of applying his knowledge to the discomfiture of his father and grandfather. Here was an opportunity that might never occur again.

Morse had the key of the laboratory, and he opened it. The two friends passed in without taking the trouble to shut the door.

Romeo crept up, with eyes well out of his head, suggestive of those in the heads of boiled prawns, and he got near enough to see and hear all that was done and said in that abode of chemical mystery.

"We will take these three with us," said Morse, picking out of a drawer three packages, one of them with a tail-like appendage to it. "This," holding up the smallest, about the size of a walnut, "I shall throw down as a warning. It will bring the beggars from their lair. This," holding up another package about double the size of the former, "will be dropped near enough to them to be dangerous; and the third"—he handled it fondly, as a father does a pet child—"this placed in the hollow of the ground will rend away a portion of the cliff and send it toppling down. The action of the explosive, Jim, is downward."

"It is made of dynamite?" said Jim.

"Of an explosive of that nature," answered Morse. "One has to consider what is necessary in the making of these things. Of course I had them ready. They were made on spec. Now they will come into use. You take the two preliminaries, as I will call them. I will carry the third."

"Why the third more than the other two?" asked Jim.

"Because the slightest jar may bring about an explosion," coolly answered Morse.

He took out his handkerchief, and with exceeding care deposited the dangerous missile therein. Jim, by his directions, placed the other two in the side-pockets of his jacket.

"Now," said Morse, "we are ready. All I wish to warn you against is tumbling about or rubbing against anything. We have lots of time, and can go easy."

Romeo hid himself behind a tree until the pair had emerged from the laboratory and the door was locked. Then, as they started off in the direction of the chine, he followed them as before.

But he kept well out of their reach, inspired to extra caution by what he had overheard.

Talking for a time in an undertone, and afterwards proceeding in silence, Jim and Morse walked along the beach until they were within a furlong or so of the chine. Then Morse led the way to a precipitous part of the cliff, on the face of which a variety of shrubs grew.

Apparently there was no means of ascent, but Morse began to climb up, and Jim followed him, both moving with exceeding care.

A false step would inevitably have resulted in the destruction of one or both.

From one projection to another, assisting their ascent by aid of the bushes, they went, with Romeo, who made light of the obstacles to easy ascent, until the top of the cliff was reached in safety.

It was crowned with bushes and trees, and here Romeo would have lost those he was tracking but for the acute hearing and keen sight he was endowed with, in common with most of his people.

Morse continued to be the guide, and he kept on straight through the wood. Romeo walked stealthily along in a parallel direction, and found he was very near the edge of the chine.

After a short journey Morse halted, and by the dim light of the stars Romeo saw him make a sign to Jim to remain still for a moment or two while he crept forward and reconnoitred.

Romeo remained where he was, crouching behind a bush, with the dark hollow of the chyne close upon his right.

There are not many people who would have been able to distinguish, as he did, the shadowy form of Morse as he moved forward, and, about twenty yards ahead, bore down upon the verge of the precipitous slope that overlooked the chine.

He peered below for a few moments, and then, kneeling on the ground, seemed to be busy awhile burying something. Meanwhile Jim, getting impatient, moved slowly forward, and was at length summoned by an upraised hand to join his companion.

Romeo, burning with curiosity, crept nearer, working his way along upon his stomach, and still keeping by the edge of the cliff.

Jim, having joined his companion, was directed to hurl his first missile into the depths of the chine. He did so, and a report that was like the boom of a small cannon followed.

From below, half-way down the slope, there came a sound of men's voices uttering cries of alarm. At first they were muffled, but became more distinct as the startled Spaniards came out of their cave to the open air.

The second missile was thrown, and the explosion which took place below the terrified Spaniards was a terrific roar, awakening a hundred echoes in the chyne and resounding far and wide.

And now the men were in full retreat, not knowing the origin of the sound, making their way towards the sea by a sloping, downward path. Morse, who had been kneeling on the ground, now rose to his feet, and backed from the cliff to some distance in the rear, accompanied by Jim.

Romeo kept to his post, wondering what would be the next move. He was very near the verge of the chine.

Ahead, near where Morse had been, was a small spark, such as the glowworm shows. Romeo could see it through the bushes, and he wondered what it was.

While he yet wondered there was a sound of ripping and rending, and he saw the earth between him and the boys split up, and that portion on which he was slowly leant over towards the chine, and then with a rush he went rolling down.

"Gemysquash!" he roared, "wurra dis?"

Then he felt himself toppling down with some hundred tons of earth into the depths of the chine.

The work of scaring the Spaniards was done, and well done, and they were in full retreat.

They got clear of the chine, and hastening to their boat, which was resting on the shore, hurriedly pushed it off and put to sea.

"An earthquake!" they cried in their terror, and not the least alarmed among them was their leader, Espardo Reonardo.

"The whole island is doomed," he said. "Hark! can you not hear the growling of the earth below?"

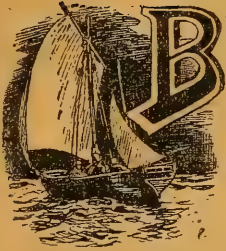
They all said they could hear it, but it was imagination. There was no growling of the earth, naught but the sound of the rippling sea as it lazily lapped the shore.

But imagination was enough, and with the aid of a light breeze the Spaniard put his craft before the wind and headed for Minorca.

Thus was the island freed of one foe for the time, but not for ever. Moreover, there were other and more dangerous enemies on the way to give trouble to the boys of the Island School.

CHAPTER XX

BURIED ALIVE.



BY hurrying forward in the direction of their point of ascent, the boys were just in time to dimly make out the white sail of the Spaniard's boat going out to sea. Thus they were able to realise the full success of their night's work.

"Morse," said Jim, exultingly, "you are a wonderful fellow!"

"Oh, no," replied Morse, "it is the materials I use that are wonderful. I have never before been able to fully test my discoveries, and I must say that I am more than satisfied. The last explosion was a complete success."

"The sound of it was terrific," said Jim; "it partially deafened me. But did you not hear a cry of some sort that was uttered near us immediately after the crash."

"Can't say I noticed it," said Morse; "the fact is I was too much engaged in noting the general action of the compound. It appears to me to have a double action—practically, to our slow faculties, simultaneous, but in reality separate and distinct. One is downward, vertical; the other horizontal."

"I won't go into details of action with you, Morse," said Jim, laughing; "it is enough for one of my simple mind that success has crowned your idea. Now, in the morning we can go to Nap and put his mind at ease. The island is free of his foes."

"For the present."

"Well, yes. But by the time they come back again, if ever they do, I hope we shall be in a position to give them a warm reception. My goodness! when I think of the effect of that stuff, it gives me the creeps to think of what would be the result of a blow-up near the school."

"I have thought of that myself," mused Morse, as he began the descent of the cliff, "and I think it both necessary and desirable that I should store certain things in a safer place than the laboratory. If Nap realises the real nature of my researches, I am afraid he will put a stop to them."

"I have looked off part of the castle," said Jim, "where I intend arms and ammunition to be kept. You had better fix on a room there. There are lots to pick and choose from. The key is ponderous, but simple, and I can make you one like it. I'll tackle the job to-morrow."

"You mean to-day. It must be two o'clock."

"To-day, of course."

They were at the bottom of the cliff by this time, and hastening towards the house, were somewhat perturbed on seeing several windows lighted up.

"The explosion has aroused some of them," muttered Jim, "and I will lay odds Nap is among them."

"If he is up," advised Morse, "we had better tell our story right away. It will send him to bed comfortable, for a change. Of late he has lived like a man wearing a hair shirt."

The window by which they had made their exit was still open, and they entered the house. There were voices above, and the sound of slippers moving about.

"I tell you," said the voice of the schoolmaster, "that I heard a most terrific explosion as if the island were rent in twain. Moreover, the house rocked."

"Perhaps it was an earthquake."

It was Mr. Groby who was speaking now, and then Mr. Storeby came in.

"I believe," he said, "that we have some Jonah on the island who will bring trouble on trouble. He ought to be discovered and cast overboard."

"Bah!" exclaimed Mr. Groby, "casting overboard from an island will be a tough job. Shall we go down and have a look outside?"

There was a murmur of assent, and then the footsteps of the masters were heard on the stairs.

"Now to give them a staggerer," said Jim. "Ahem! Ahem!"

It was a very bad cough he was troubled with, considering the short notice it gave of its coming. There was a halting of the men above.

"Who is down there?" asked Mr. Farrell, in quavering tones;

"Gordon, sir."

"What are you doing up at this hour?"

"I was just coming up to explain, sir."

"Stop where you are. We are coming down."

When the masters appeared—they were all in the light apparel of dressing-gown and slippers—they were considerably astonished to find that Jim was not alone.

The two boys stood demurely in the hall, looking as if butter would not melt in their mouths.

Mr. Farrell was the whitest in countenance of all there, and his fellow-men as a body looked far from rosy; but he put on an authoritative air, and asked the meaning of the boys being up.

"We have been out, sir—on an expedition," said Jim.

Then he went into the matter tersely but clearly, going back to the time when he discovered the presence of the Spaniards in the chine, and finishing with their hurried departure that night.

"It was all Morse's doing, sir," said Jim, in conclusion. "I never in my life heard anything like the

roar of the explosions, especially the last. You ought to have been there to see and hear it, sir."

The men looked at Morse wonderingly, and he bore the inspection with quiet ease. Suddenly what he had feared darted into the mind of the schoolmaster.

"I appreciate your good work, Morse," he said, "but now that it has relieved me by the terrifying of a gang of scoundrels from the island, I cannot encourage you to go on. The study of that class of chemistry is too dangerous."

"Not if carried out with care, sir," urged Morse.

"Oh, but I should live in terror if I thought you were going on with these inventions so near the house. The laboratory must be closed."

"Very well, sir," quietly responded Morse.

"I will have the place cleared out," continued Mr. Farrell, "and put the building to another use."

"Whoever clears it out, sir," said Morse, "will have to be very careful in moving certain things. I will undertake to remove them all in two days—to a safe place."

"Everything must be destroyed—*destroyed*—Morse," said the schoolmaster, testily. "Really, when I think of the risk we have been running with such material near us, it turns me cold."

"I think the boys have done excellent work," remarked Mr. Groby, in an undertone, "and preaching either of risks past and gone won't do them any good. Send them to bed and talk to them further on the morrow."

"I suppose you have nothing in the explosive way about you now?" said Mr. Farrell, anxiously.

"I don't think I have," replied Morse, maliciously, slapping his pockets. "Gordon, have you anything left?"

"Nothing that I know of," answered Jim, carelessly.

"Nothing that he knows of? Good gracious!" exclaimed the schoolmaster.

"Go to bed, boys," said Mr. Groby, and with a quiet grin on their faces they hastened upstairs.

"It seems to me," said the schoolmaster, "that I no sooner get rid of one terror than another crops up. Fancy a boy being able to make explosives of that nature!"

"As I said," replied Mr. Groby, "he has done a good work. It will be interesting for us to visit the chine to-morrow and see the nature of it. Now, sir, with your permission I will return to bed."

Mr. Groby plainly had no patience with the pusillanimity of the schoolmaster, but that unhappy man was not alone in his fears. The peace-loving Storeby was similarly troubled.

"Morse," he said, as they went upstairs in a body, "is the sort of boy who will make a destructive man.

He will devote his abilities to the confusion of mankind."

"To the confusion of your grandmother," said Mr. Groby, as he turned into his room. "Good-night, Mr. Farrell. Be proud of those two boys, sir."

Mr. Farrell muttered something in reply, but the nature of it was not clear, and the men parted for the night to get what sleep they could.

The house was soon still again, and it remained so until the morning.

Romeo did not return. Where was he?

That most unfortunate nigger was buried alive under the most extraordinary circumstances that ever fell to the lot of man.

CHAPTER XXI.

EVELINE FINDS A LETTER.—VISIT TO THE CHINE.



THERE was one thing in the school, connected with domestic affairs, none of the trio of niggers was allowed to perform on any pretence whatever. That was the dusting and the arranging of Mr. Farrell's private room.

This was a matter Eveline herself attended to every morning before breakfast.

Unconscious of the events of the preceding night she arose in the morning, and, attired in a plain but very taking calico dress, wended her way to the room where her august parent often sat and meditated on the pains and penalties of being a great man.

First of all the general dusting was performed, and finally she attended to the table, where she sorted and arranged the books and papers thereon.

Attached to that table were two drawers, invariably kept locked, and supposed to hold the secret papers of the schoolmaster. Anyway, he had always shown marked care in keeping their contents hidden from the eyes of his wife and daughter, and that alone was sufficient to excite their curiosity.

On this particular morning Eveline discovered, to her amazement, and perhaps joy, that the key had been left in the lock of one of the drawers, and that one key served for both.

Now or never was she to learn whether there were any really mysterious things in those drawers or not.

She certainly hesitated for a moment, and thought it was rather a mean thing to do. But assuredly there could be no great harm in just peeping in, and, opening the drawer, she peeped in accordingly.

It was chock-full of letters, and the impossibility of making anything like an examination of them all was

too obvious to be ignored. But there was one on the top, in its envelope, which she remembered having seen on the day when Jim Gordon last brought the mail in from the sea.

It bore the Minorca postmark, and the handwriting of the address was peculiar. A novice would have seen that it was disguised.

Eveline hesitated once again, and then she took out the letter and removed the inner portion from the envelope.

A glance at its contents compelled her to read the whole carefully. Here is the letter in its entirety:

"SEÑOR,—When you were last at Minorca, an offer was made you by Espardo Reonardo for the hand of your daughter, who is, as you English look at women, little more than a girl. We Spaniards hold different views, and our women, when they can, marry early.

"Reonardo was willing to wait a year, or even two, provided the regular form of betrothment was gone through. That showed he was better than most Spaniards. You declined the offer, and he angrily informed you, señor, that whether you willed it or not he would espouse your daughter. He is a man of his word, and will do much to gain his end.

"Having waited awhile he has amused himself by fooling with a woman who thought he loved her. She has recently learnt the truth, and writes to you this letter, that you may beware of Reonardo, for, having waited awhile for you to yield, he is now preparing to move. He will descend upon you and yours in secret. He will stop at nothing to gain his ends. He will also make sure that he will not be interfered with by your Government at home, by destroying all who have a right to interfere. He is an accursed, faithless villain, and were it not for the love he has inspired me with, I would destroy him. That is not your task. As he works in secret, so must you. Wait and watch for him. Say nothing to anyone around you until the time comes. Then, if you are a man, protect your child. But do not kill him, for he is loved by one who, while wronged, will still avenge him. He must neither be slain nor dishonoured nor disgraced by you. He must simply be *foiled*. You are a great man, and should know how to act. Farewell."

That was all. There was no signature, and Eveline read it through twice in dumb amazement.

She was still young, and although many of her age take on themselves the care of a household, the bare idea of marriage—and to a Spaniard, too—was repulsive to her.

She, however, understood the recently exhibited trouble of her father, and knowing his weak and vacillating nature, understood why he had kept this letter to himself instead of confiding its contents to others who might assist him to rid himself and her of the unwelcome attentions of the Spaniard.

She was sorely puzzled and distressed, not knowing what to do. Her mother would not help her. She would in all probability do nothing more than shed a few tears, and express her wonder at "the rude audacity of the Spaniard, Reonardo." There was only one other person in the house to whom Eveline would care to show such a letter, and that was Jim.

Eveline believed in Jim as being as good in an emergency as any man in the house. To Jim, there-

fore, when she got an opportunity, she would show this letter.

Placing it in her pocket, she shifted the key to the other drawer—an artful move, intended to keep her father from examining the drawer from which she had taken the letter—and finished her work.

By this time the whole house was stirring, and Macbeth and Hamlet were looking about for the missing Romeo.

"Dat boy," said Macbeth, "gone a-fishin' or sumfin' of dat sort. I reckon, Hamlet, dat we not strick enuf wid him. He gettin' into ways dat am on de borders ob rebellion."

"If dere was any gals on de island," said Hamlet, "I should 'spect him ob goin' courtin'."

"Massy on us!" exclaimed Macbeth, aghast. "He nebber hab dat rordacity. A boy like dat a-courtin'!"

"He twenty-six or dereabouts," said Hamlet.

"Too young," said Macbeth. "But hurry up wid de work, so dat when he *do* come back, we got three minutes to spare to gib him a spankin'."

Meanwhile, as there was no further occasion for secrecy, the story of the night's adventure had been told, and it flashed round the school. Jim spoke freely of a peril he now hoped was past, and made Morse the hero of the hour.

Morse was not, however, there to hear, for, in spite of a short night's sleep, he had risen early, and, with Jim's key of the back part of the castle, had begun to transfer some of his more precious materials to that better place.

As he honestly told the schoolmaster, he had in his possession compounds that he would trust nobody but himself to move. They were made from materials that alone were innocent enough, as charcoal and saltpetre are, but, like those main ingredients of gunpowder when combined, are terrible in their action.

Breakfast-time arrived and no Romeo. It became necessary to report his absence, which was done by Macbeth, to the schoolmaster, who expressed a hope that some big crab, or some other marine monster, had got hold of and made a meal of him.

"If I have any more bother with any of you," he added, for Macbeth's benefit, "I shall import some more servants from Africa and give you the sack—you hear—the sack!"

Mr. Farrell's temper had not improved. On the contrary, a growing sense of security was developing the overbearing nature of a testy, arrogant man, and it arose from the fact that he was rather ashamed of himself for the display he had recently made of something which might be called cowardice.

Macbeth and Hamlet did as well as they could without Romeo, who was missed but not inquired for. It was assumed, where there was any assumption that he was engaged elsewhere in some other duty.

The chief talk was of the Spaniards, their mysterious stay upon the island, and abrupt departure under the influence of terror. Morse, quietly eating his breakfast, refused to discuss the subject. "It is nothing," he said, mysteriously. "One of these days I will show you something to make you blink."

One feeling prevailed—it was curiosity to see the place where the explosion had taken place. As, however, the school had been closed the day before, it was doubtful if anyone would be allowed to go before the afternoon; but, to the general joy, it was Mr. Farrell who announced, without being approached on the subject, that the visit would take place that morning immediately after breakfast.

He himself would accompany them, and all who desired to go to the chine were to assemble outside the house as soon as possible after the morning meal was over.

It is needless to say that the attendance was very strong. With the exception of Old Chorker, who openly stated that the yarn about the Spaniards was all lies, there was not an absentee. It was reckoned they would get back by half-past ten, when some of the usual scholastic duties could be attended to.

Now that all the danger was over, Mr. Napoleon Farrell became the general again. As his great namesake might have marshalled his old warriors to visit with him the scene of their glorious exploits, so did he form all his dependents and pupils into a sort of procession and head it to the chine.

Before they got very far in, the effect of the explosion was visible in the form of a landslip of rock, earth, and shrubs, which had fairly blocked a narrow part of the chine.

It had shot down the entire mass like snow driven over the edge of the cliff, and, to the wonder and delight of the boys, the mouth of an unsuspected cave—the largest yet seen in the chine—was revealed.

It was apparent that this cave had by some means been stopped up, and so, up to the present, hidden from view.

Mr. Farrell halted his followers and surveyed the scene from below. He was thinking of improving the occasion by a little lecture on explosives; but when his audience, on being requested to be silent, had become so, the stillness was broken by a loud groan.

Where it came from none at that moment could tell. Mr. Farrell frowned.

"I trust," he said, "that there will be no unseemly jesting on the part of anyone here."

Another groan responded.

"It came from up there," said Terry, pointing to the cave.

"Impossible!" said Mr. Farrell, turning pale. "Who should be there to groan?"

"It came from that direction, sir," said Gordon.

"Why not go up and see who originated it?" suggested Mr. Groby.

"If any of you wish to do so," said the hesitating schoolmaster; and ere he could say more, there was a breaking away of the boys, and a general scrambling up the rugged mass in the direction of the cave.

The elder and more active among the boys forged on ahead, and Terry, who happened to get a good start, led the way.

When he was about two-thirds of the way up, he was seen to halt, stagger a bit, and then throw up his hands in horror.

"Boys!" shouted Mr. Farrell, "come back!"

But Terry retreated no further; and as he was joined by Brodie, Morse, and two or three more, he made a hurried motion, pointing to a big stone projecting from the disordered ground of the slope.

Brodie came tearing down. The rest went on, and were seen to stop and wonderingly examine something.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Farrell, as Brodie leaped down to the level near him.

"A man's head—a black man's—sticking out of the ground, sir!" he replied.

And then from aloft there came a cry of "It's Romeo!"

"Romeo!" exclaimed the schoolmaster. "How came he there?"

But he put the question to the empty air, for all else, including Brodie, were making their way upwards.

It was indeed Romeo, buried up to the chin in the ground, and the soil was pressing against him with inconvenient firmness, by reason of his having a huge piece of rock close in, before and behind him.

There was, however, a considerable quantity of soft earth between, or it would have been all over with that hapless nigger.

He was in a very bad way in any case, having passed many hours in a very painful position, and scarcely able to breathe.

He was just able to groan and no more.

The boys had no proper tools for removing the soil and extricating him, but they utilised sticks and pointed stones, and also their pocket-knives, and even their hands, to remove the earth and dislodge the smaller stones mixed with it. Ere long he had his chest free, with the result that he could draw a longer breath, and managed to get out a word or two.

"You jes' in time, gen'lmen," he said, "you berry good."

"How did you get yourself in this fix?" asked Mr. Groby.

Romeo closed his eyes again and groaned.

"De sperrits bring me here," he said.

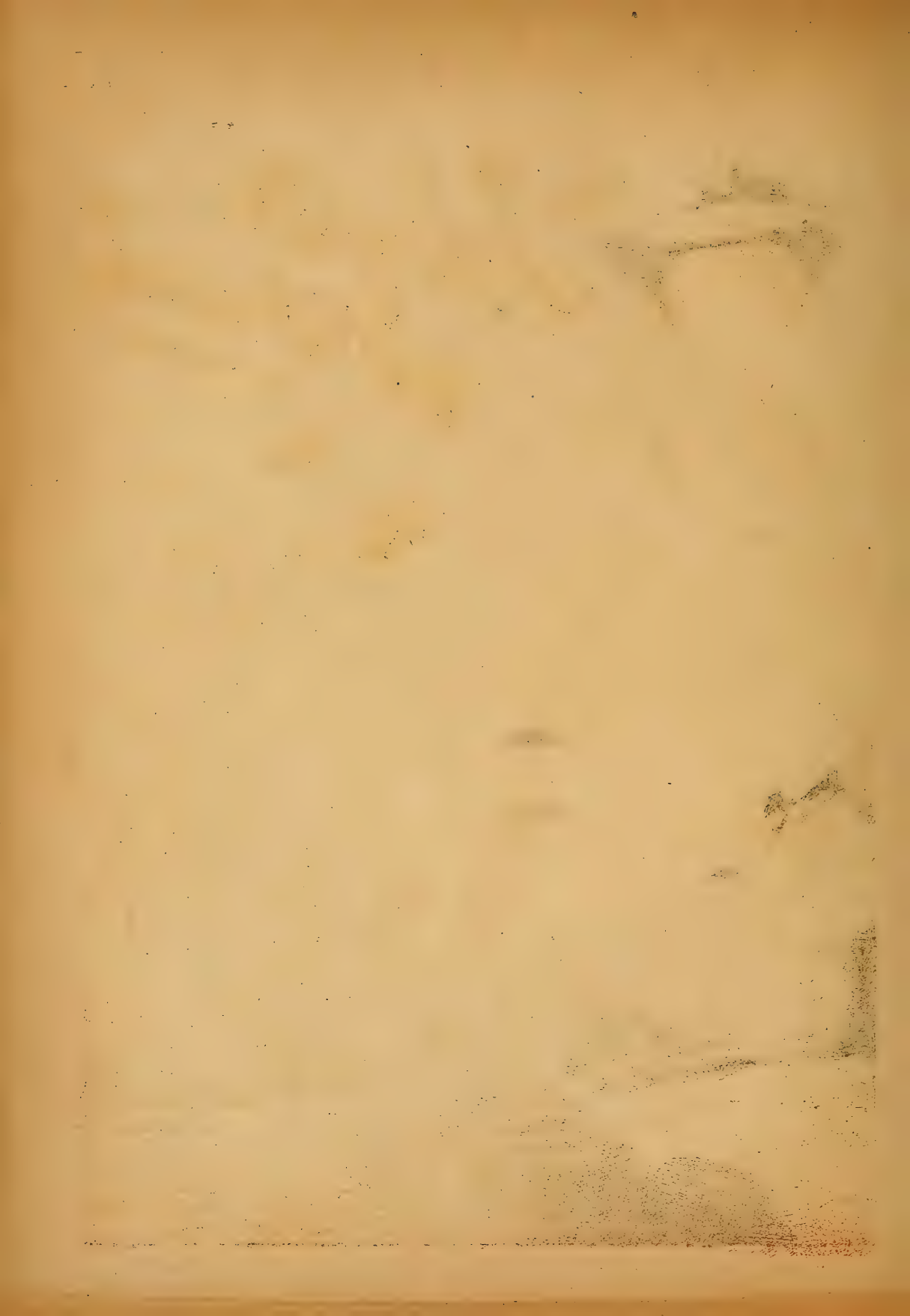
"Gammon!" said Mr. Groby. "But we won't worry you with any more questions now. Here, give

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



For a moment they stared at him wild-eyed and chilled, and then with one voice they cried out "CHORKER!"



me your hands. Wriggle, and let us see if you can't be drawn out."

The wriggling powers of Romeo were of the feeblest, but with pushing and pulling by many hands he was at last drawn out and laid upon the ground, once more breathing the air of perfect freedom.

Jim, with Morse, stood apart. They shrewdly guessed that Romeo had been playing the spy upon them.

"And that won't do, you know," said Jim.

"No," assented Morse; "we may have him doing it at inconvenient times. The natural curiosity of the nigger is abnormally developed, I suppose. I don't suppose he is very much hurt."

"It will take more than that to kill a nigger," said Jim. "It is not worth while saying anything to him, I suppose?"

"No, but the next time he plays the spy upon us I will give him a sickener."

By dint of having his limbs rubbed, Romeo soon showed he was recovering his ordinary elasticity of body. He had received no material injury, and he stuck to the declaration that he had not the least idea how he came there, but supposed "the sperrits" had taken him out of bed, and in pure rollicking malevolence—he called it devilment fun—had made a hole and stood him upright in the earth.

Finally, on his declaring that he thought he could walk home without assistance, he was allowed to go, and he crept away, making much of his weakness until he was out of sight and out of the chine.

Then he increased his pace and hurried back to the house, expecting to be received with open arms and tears of joy by his father and grandfather.

But on entering the kitchen he was favoured with the first salute from Hamlet, who was washing up the breakfast-things. Before he could offer the least explanation, a big wet cloth was dashed into his face and a bowl of dirty water followed.

"You little warmint!" howled Hamlet, "whar you been?"

Romeo, who was really rather weak, sank into a chair and burst out sobbing.

"Dis a nice deception," he roared, "to gib you boy dat hab been run out ob de house by de sperrits and buried alive! Mind you dis: it your turn nex'!"

"You bellied alibe?" exclaimed Hamlet.

"Yes; you ax de skullmaster and de res' ob dem if dey not find me buried up to my chin. Dey been digging me out dis arf-hour."

"Here, what all dis?" cried Macbeth, as he entered the kitchen. "I see, you come back. Whar in de name ob all dat am infernal hab you been disportin' you ugly carcase?"

Hamlet explained for him, and Macbeth listened with a smile of incredulity.

"Sperrits!" he said, curling his lip up so that it touched his nose.

"All right," said Romeo; "de massa and de res' be back 'recktly. Ax 'em how dey foun' me. Perhaps you tink I bury myself alive?"

"What sort ob sperrits was dey?"

"Dere was tree ob dem. De smallest nine feet high."

"Lorramassy, Romeo!"

"Fack, I 'sure you," said Romeo. "I was a-lyin' in de bed upstairs larse night in de soun' sleep ob stoncious innercence, when der was a hand big as a fryin'-pan laid on my shoul'er. I woke up and see a yaller face wif red eyes bendin' ober me."

"A yaller face?" chorused the listeners.

"Dat de colour," said Romeo. "De oders was blue and green, and dey all had smoke coming from dere nostrums."

"Golly wars!" exclaimed Hamlet.

"Me got a lot more to tell, but mus' hab sumfin' to eat fust," said Romeo. "'Member dis, I had nuffin' dis mornin'."

His two relatives knew not whether to believe him or not, but they were kept on the safe side by their fears. Some bread-and-butter and tea were provided for him, and he disposed of it as if his throat were a shoot leading to a gastronomical cellar.

It took some time to satisfy his full requirements. The other two negroes meanwhile finished clearing away the breakfast-things.

"Now den, Romeo," said Macbeth, "you was woke up. Did dey say nuffin'?"

"At de fust dey was quiet and kep' on lookin' at me and den at you two, as if makin' up dere min's 'bout de one to take away. Den one say in a whisper dat was a sort ob screech: 'We take dis one fust, and come for de oders to-morrer night.'

"'Dere on'y one ting to stop us,' say anoder, 'and dat am two cross-sticks put outside de door. If dat done,' he say, in a sort ob howl, 'no mortiful ghose darse pass in.'"

"You hear dat?" said Macbeth and Hamlet together.

Both were sensibly relieved. Romeo, having got his subject well in hand, continued his veracious narrative.

"I listen pertickler, in case I get the roppertulity to come back to you wif it all. De nex' ting done was for one ob dem to parse him hand ober my nose, and me was insensibly on de apot, so dat me 'member no more till me wake up in de chine, buried up to my neck in de dirt."

"If you been tellin' lies, I flay you!" said Macbeth.

"Ax de massa when he come back," said Romeo, earnestly, "and if dey not find me dere, put forks all ober my body like de quills ob de goose."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CAVE IN THE CLIFF.



ROMEO having departed to tell his veracious story to his astounded relatives, his rescuers proceeded up to the mouth of the cave which the explosion had brought into view.

Hitherto, although many caves had been found on the island, they were all of the shallow class, the deepest not extending more than thirty yards from the mouth.

But this new discovery promised to be of a different nature, and the first intimation they had of it was the deep echoes aroused by their voices as the boys gathered round the mouth of it.

"It will be necessary to be careful in going down there," said Morse, as he peered into the dark opening, "for having been closed so long, there must be a considerable accumulation of foul gases."

"Don't forget," suggested Joe Ganthony, "that it has been open since last night."

"Foul gas is generally heavy," replied Morse, "and moves slowly. However, we can go in and see what it is like."

So they entered in twos and threes, until the major part of the boys were within it. Some of the little ones held back, but the men all went in, including Mr. Farrell, who now, being convinced that there was no enemy to fear, valiantly climbed the slope and joined the boys.

The air seemed to be perfectly pure just within the cave, but the extent of it could not be judged. Jim Gordon and some of the elder boys penetrated to a considerable distance, until the mouth of the cave was a mere speck of light in the distance in fact, but the termination of it was not discovered.

"I don't think it would be wise to go on without a light," said Jim.

Acting on this suggestion, they returned to the mouth of the cave, where the rest had gathered, and reported to Mr. Farrell the result of their venturing so far.

The schoolmaster thought they had done enough for the day, and promised that at "an early date" they should have a day off and be suitably provided with light and other essentials to make a thorough examination of the cave.

As the same time it was clear he had no personal liking for the task, and viewed the latest discovery with feelings of apprehension.

This was further shown by his asking, as they jour-

neyed back, if it was not possible that the cave might be the lair of wild animals of a ferocious nature.

Mr. Groby, to whom the remark was addressed, merely smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"You think that is impossible," said the schoolmaster.

"No, but rather improbable, considering that until last night the cave was sealed up."

"I forgot that," said Mr. Farrell.

"Don't forget," continued Mr. Groby, somewhat maliciously, "that you have never explored a third of the island. It is difficult to say what may be found upon it. Think of the vast forest at the back of the castle——"

"A mere jungle," said the schoolmaster, "impenetrable to man beyond a certain distance. It is marked so in the map given me by the Spanish authorities."

"Who, of course, are infallible."

"I presume they would not go to the trouble of making an incorrect map."

"In the ordinary course," said Mr. Groby, thoughtfully, "the boys will have their usual holidays in a week's time. How would it do for them to spend it in exploring parties about the island? They need not all leave at once, but divide them into sections, each with one or two adults to assist them. There are several tents among the stores which could be utilised for the expeditions. Indeed, there are some of the boys who might be trusted to go alone."

"They may fall in with my foes," said Mr. Farrell, with a haggard look round. "Though they have been temporarily driven away, I fear they may return."

"A mere handful of scoundrels," said Mr. Groby, contemptuously, "who landed here on some roving expedition of robbery."

"You don't know everything," said the schoolmaster.

Macbeth and Hamlet were awaiting the return of the party. They were anxious to verify the story of the veracious Romeo. It was entirely verified as far as finding him buried up to the neck went, and as he could not have possibly put himself in that position, the natural inference of the elder niggers was that the spirits had really done it.

Overcome with terror, they returned to their duties, but now Romeo came to the fore as a friend and comforter.

He repaid many years of oppression and persecution by acting as a buffer between them and their supernatural enemies.

"You leab dem sperrits to me," he said; "me keep dem away. It no use *your* puttin' de cross-sticks outside de door. Dat mus' be done by a disundressedt pusson like dis chile. It am a law 'mong sperrits dat

de boy who hab been buried alibe and come out ob it am free. He am a sort ob circumventicle to dem, and derefore, if he put de sticks, de sperrits am so fer done for."

"You do dat, sure," said Macbeth, tearfully, "for you poor ole grandfather, who was alwus kind to you."

"And you fader, too," urged Hamlet; "him dat muss you when you was a lilly kid."

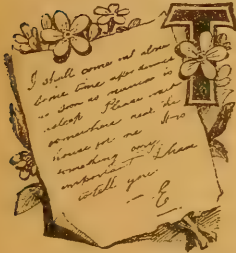
"I do my bes' fo' you," said Romeo, "but dere am sumfin' to be 'spected in return. You do my work to-day, for all de blessed night me not get a wink, and den see what me do for you. Now, sure dat am a fair reposal?"

They admitted it was, and for that day Romeo laboured not. He ate and drank his fill also, taking short snatches of sleep between, and altogether had a rosy time of it.

How he worked his share of the contract by laying the spirits must be left to a future chapter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EVELINE AND JIM.—LUCIA DE VALO AGAIN.



THE usual routine of the school was resumed, and in the afternoon all the workshops were busy. From that of Martin came the ring of the hammer upon the anvil, and strong young arms, under the direction of the sturdy blacksmith, lustily beat the red-hot iron into requisite shapes.

By the door, however, there was one who stood idle. It was Jim Gordon. He, with Morse, in return for the good work they had done in the night, were exempt from labour.

Morse utilised his holiday by completing the removal of the more dangerous compounds from the laboratory to the castle. Jim would have had a go at the anvil but for a strip of paper which Eveline an hour before had slipped into his hand as they met near the dining-room.

On it were written a few words only, but they sufficed to keep Jim idle:

"I shall come out alone some time after dinner, as soon as mamma is asleep. Please wait somewhere near the house for me. It is something very important I have to tell you.—E."

That was all, but enough for Jim, who naturally waited for the coming of Eveline.

It was the first letter he had ever received from her, and, although the contents were nothing very striking, it was a very precious communication. Jim liked Eveline, in an honest, boyish way, very much.

He looked upon her as a peerless sort of girl. She, as the Yankees say, entirely filled the bill, being possessed of a charming disposition, in addition to her beauty. Jim admired her very much indeed, and that she was inclined to like Jim may be put down as incontrovertible.

Ting-a-ring, ting-a-ring, ting, ting! rang the hammers on the air, until, at a signal from Martin, the work stopped.

"Well done, my lads!" he said to the boys as they wiped the perspiration from their foreheads. "So you are idle this afternoon, Mr. Gordon?"

"Yes," replied Jim.

"Goes against the grain, doesn't it?"

"A little; but I am expecting somebody from the house—— Ah! there she is. Good-bye for the present. I will look in on my way back."

He darted off, and Martin, walking to the door, saw him greet Eveline as she emerged from the house. They walked away in the opposite direction.

"A pretty sight," muttered Martin. "I call to mind the time when I had a sweetheart—'My Sweetheart when a Boy.' There's a song about that sort of thing. Ah! what would I give to feel as young and happy as I did then? Blow up the bellows there. We'll get on with our work, my lads."

And Martin proceeded to beat out some of the feeling aroused by memories of the past. Anyway, he tried to, but it was not an easy task.

Jim and Eveline walked on until they were out of the sight of the house, just beyond the ground where the men sometimes played quoits, and then sat down upon a sandy slope close to the sea.

"Jim," said Eveline, "I daresay you think me a forward creature writing to you like that, but if you do, I can't help it."

Jim earnestly assured her he was far from thinking such a thing. On the contrary, he was quite sure she would not have written unless she had urgent need to do so.

"That's just it," said Eveline; "I want a friend, and I don't know where to turn to one who can help me. Papa is soon worried, and mamma goes off at a tangent, and there is nobody else in the house I can look to. Jim, there is a horrid Spaniard who wants to marry me. What do you think of that? As if I should think of marrying at all for years to come, and never to a Spaniard!"

"I should think not!" indignantly exclaimed Jim. "Who is the ragamuffin?"

"Read that letter," said Eveline; and she gave him the epistle she had taken from the drawer in her father's room.

Jim read it through, not with so much surprise as Eveline expected to see. Indeed, it was evidently, in a degree, satisfactory to him.

"Now," he said, "I understand everything. I know the woman who wrote this letter."

"You know her!" exclaimed Eveline.

"I guess I do," said Jim.

"Goodness! how is that?"

"I have seen her on the island. It was not long ago. I tumbled across her near the castle."

"Jim," said Eveline, "you never told me this."

"I never had an opportunity," replied Jim; "besides, I thought it would do no good."

"Then you do not care to see her again?"

"Not I. I hope she will keep away from here."

"Jim, I think you are very sensible. Neither sex of the Spaniards are much good."

"With regard to this letter," said Jim, "I wouldn't worry over it, if I were you. Don't wander about the island alone, but keep near home. Perhaps we have given this Reonardo a sickener. Anyway, we will try to do it the next time he comes along. I intend to form a vigilance body especially to protect you, Evy."

"Now, that is kind of you, Jim. Who are to be the members of it?"

"Morse, to begin with."

"Jim, I rely more upon you than all the rest."

"Is that a fact?"

"A solid fact, Jim."

"Oh, Eveline!"

And, then, as the French would say, the incident came to an end with an exchange of cordial greetings.

Afterwards Jim laid some of his plans before Eveline, and she approved of them all, not merely by word of mouth but in her heart, for she thoroughly believed Jim to be a sort of Admirable Crichton, who could do no wrong.

As the afternoon was by that time well on the way, she declared she must be getting home, "to see to mamma's afternoon tea." Jim would fain have detained her a little longer, but she got up, and with a pretty little curtsy bade him good-bye.

Left alone, he sat for a time, and then rising, wandered on in the direction of Silver Bay. Suddenly, from behind a clump of rocks, the form of a woman leapt out and confronted him.

"Ha! my pretty boy," she cried, "you walk as if you were sad. Fie! and she is so nice. I see her—this young child of the schoolmaster."

It was Lucia di Valo, brown and handsome, and lithe of limb, so like a panther or a tigress. She showed her white teeth, smiling in a dry, sarcastic way.

"So you have come again?" replied Jim, hardly knowing what to say.

"I come, and I come, and I come, and I go, and go, and go as I please," she answered, vehemently. "Where is Reonardo? I hear you speak of him, you two, if I hear not all you say."

"Reonardo," answered Jim, "has bolted. We have scared him off the island."

"You scared him?"

"We did. But how we did it is our affair. He is gone."

"Come here," said Lucia, imperiously. "Nearer. I wish to speak to you. I have no dagger in my hand. I would not harm you."

Jim could not resist drawing nearer to her, although he wished himself a dozen miles away. He was as a small bird fascinated by a snake. She laid a hand upon each of his shoulders.

"Look me in the eyes," she said. "Now, you say Reonardo is gone?"

"Yes."

"When did he go?"

"Last night."

"It is strange," Lucia murmured, half-aloud. "We must have passed in the night."

Her face wore a troubled look, and she withdrew her hands from Jim's shoulders. Tapping her foot upon the soft sand, she meditated for a while, Jim watching her curiously.

Wild, wayward, impulsive and passionate, she undoubtedly was, but he could not think there was any real evil in her. When wrapt in thought there was something very sweet about the expression of her face.

"Can you read Spanish?" she abruptly inquired, raising her eyes to his.

He admitted he could not. It was one of the languages not taught in the school.

"If you could," she said, producing a bill from her pocket, "I would have asked you to read this. But I will translate for you. It puts a price upon the head of Reonardo."

Holding the bill at arm's length, she read, or rather translated aloud, as follows:

"FIVE HUNDRED DUCATS REWARD."

"Information of a robbery of magnitude committed in one of the royal castles having come to the knowledge of the authorities, and

ESPARDO REONARDO

being implicated therein, and he, the said Reonardo, having disappeared from his accustomed haunts, the above reward will be given to any of the liege subjects of Her Majesty of Spain who shall give such information as will lead to his capture."

Then followed a list of the gendarme stations where such information would be acceptable. Lucia did not read them, but folding the bill, replaced it in her pocket.

"You see," she said, "he is proscribed, and I came here to warn him. Weak, you will say. But woman, where she loves, is weak. Now he is gone into the very jaws of the lion, and unless some friend should warn him he may look to the galleys for life. For, mark you, it is a very serious thing to rob a royal ruler."

It was in Jim's heart to say that the fate was a fitting one for a man he looked upon as a scoundrel, but he refrained. Still he could not help feeling infinite satisfaction as he thought that the island was now probably free of Reonardo's presence for good and all.

"I never suspected he was poor," said Jim, for the want of something better to say.

"Poor and proud," she answered. "Too proud to do anything but rob the realm of its dues, and as you now know, to rob a king or queen. He would not," she added, with a strange pride, "have taken a ducat from one of humble birth."

Jim, personally, was unable to distinguish between robbing one person and robbing another. To his English mind theft was theft, whenever and on whomsoever performed. But it seemed that Lucia di Valo was of a different opinion. To Jim's satisfaction, she brought the interview to an end.

"I return," she said, "to my home, to mourn if they have cast him into prison, or if he has escaped to seek him. Young senior, adieu. It may be for ever. You have my good wishes, for you are handsome, and I believe brave. Farewell."

And then, with a swiftly moving step, she vanished from his sight.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TIME OF JOLLITY AND PEACE.



JIM had not felt so much at his ease since he first became aware of the threatened attack by an enemy once unknown, but whose identity was now fully revealed. He returned to the school with a light step, debating in his mind on the way what policy to pursue. Should he entirely relieve the mind of the schoolmaster, or let him live on in suspense awhile longer?

On the whole he was inclined to act on the latter lines, because he despised the cowardly spirit shown by a man who, with his name and his assumptions, ought to have exhibited a more manly front to the foe.

But then he thought of Eveline, of whom he was often thinking, and for her sake he eventually decided on doing all he could to bring peace to the mind of Mr. Farrell.

Accordingly, on his entering the house and finding it quiet, for the boys had not yet left their work and come in to tea, Jim went to the private room of the

schoolmaster. Having knocked at the door, he was bidden to come in.

Jim entered, and discovered the schoolmaster sitting at his table writing. Jim caught sight of the heading of the document, which was "The last will and testament——" and smiled.

"I am sorry to intrude upon you at this moment, sir," said Jim, "but I have a matter of much import to tell you of."

"It seems to me," replied Mr. Farrell, irritably, "that matters of import are always being thrust under my nose."

"It is something I thought you would like to hear," said Jim, "but as you are busy, sir, I will leave it for the time."

"As you are here, Gordon, you may as well tell me what it is," said the schoolmaster, more briskly.

"I will begin, sir, with asking a question. Is not the man you have been troubled with named Reonardo?"

"It is. But, in the name of goodness, Gordon, what do you know about him?"

"I know that he has recently been on the island for some felonious purpose, and he was the leader of a small gang scared away by Morse with his explosives. But the scoundrel has got into further trouble. He has been robbing one of the royal castles, and the Spanish Government has set a price upon his capture."

"How did you learn this, Gordon?"

"Will you excuse me if I do not tell you? I feel I am bound to keep it a secret. But the great fact for you to think of sir, is, that he is a proscribed man, and will have to hide away, probably in some distant country."

"I am obliged to you, Gordon, of course," said the schoolmaster, with a gracious, condescending air, "but I never was in fear of the scoundrel."

Jim could have assaulted him for his ingratitude, and the ready way he resumed his old Napoleonic air, as soon as he learnt that he no longer had anything to fear. But he kept his countenance, as in a quiet way sarcastically rejoined:

"I did not assume, sir, that you feared him. I merely thought the news that the fellow is not likely to trouble you again, would be welcome."

"It is," said Mr. Farrell. "I look at your intention more than the necessity for the information. You are one of the most worthy boys in the school, and I respect you highly."

He said this as a monarch might pay a deserved compliment to an inferior who had well and faithfully performed his duty. Jim said he hoped he should always deserve his good opinion, and retired.

"I'm blessed," he muttered, as soon as he got outside the door, "if he isn't the biggest humbug going."

However, one cannot say anything. Here comes Romeo. I want a word with him."

Romeo was going upstairs with two short sticks in his hand, and with a broad grin upon his face, which subsided when he saw who was coming towards him.

"Dat you, Massa Gordon?" he said.

"Of course it is," replied Jim. "What are you going to do with those sticks?"

Romeo shuffled to and fro on his feet, and stared about him, before replying.

"Massa Gordon," he said, "dem's de on'y tings to lay de sperrits."

"What sperits?"

"Dem as come worrying people in de night. Dat fader ob mine and granfader neber get no sleep for dem."

"And you are going to lay the sperits?"

"Dat so, Massa Gordon."

"Romeo," said Jim, "you were playing the spy the other night, and spies are worse than ghosts. If you do that sort of thing again you will be laid in a way that will stop your little tricks."

"Massa Gordon, on my oaf I neber try dat sort ob ting agen."

"Very well. Just tell me what class of lie you have been telling now. Out with it. Don't try to deceive me!"

Romeo was a born prevaricator, and he did his level best to get out of telling the truth; but Jim was determined to have it, and he made a full confession.

"Now, don't you think," said Jim, sternly, "that you are a great sinner to try this humbugging game on your progenitors?"

"My progerenitors?" said Romeo. "What dem?"

"Your father and grandfather."

"Oh!" exclaimed Romeo, "dem's progerenitors, am dey? Massa Gordon, I boun' to do sumfin' to get a moment peace wid dem. Dey treat me as a lilly boy. Dey put a limick on my grub. Dey wallop me. I do dis for peace and plenty, Massa Gordon. When dey know dat I 'lone hab de power to keep away de ghosts dey treat me more like a pusson growed up."

"But if they find you are humbugging them, they will treat you worse than ever."

"Massa Gordon, dey neber 'spect it unless some-borry tell 'em. Dey two born fools and nuffin' less."

"That is a very disrespectful way of speaking of them, Romeo."

"Can't help dat, Massa Gordon. It am de trufe."

Jim shook his head in a dissenting manner, and left Romeo to pursue his way to his bedroom, where he hid the two sticks under his bed for use later on.

By that time the workshops were closed, and Jim looked up Morse to tell him the good tidings concerning Reonardo. But Morse was not so sanguine that they had seen the last of the villain.

"For my part," he said, "I should not be disposed to entirely trust that girl. What is her name?"

"Lucia di Valo."

"Well, she may be acting on the square with us, and she may not. Time will tell. Meanwhile, we can get on with the work we have begun, and wait and see what time brings forth."

That evening Mr. Napoleon Farrell appeared at the tea-table and presided. After the meal was over he favoured all assembled with an address on the recent visit of Reonardo to the island.

He admitted that the man *might* have been dangerous, unless he felt that he had one to cope with who would not endure any of his nonsense. But finding that he would be resolutely met, he had, under cover of a sham terror of being blown up, retreated. Mr Farrell admitted that *some* service had been rendered by Morse and Jim Gordon, and he congratulated the boys on having two such clever and plucky youngsters among them.

He wound up with an all-round assurance that the original life on the island might be now resumed, and the boys, as before, would be allowed to wander where they willed within reasonable limits.

Then he strutted from the room, beaming with self-satisfaction, leaving those who knew all the facts to secretly laugh at him, and those who did not to congratulate themselves on having so good a head to the school.

The next day the work on the vegetable farm and in the vineyard was resumed, and the house assumed its general aspect.

Certain of the boys, under the direction of Jim and Morse, went on with the forts, and Rob Changeling worked like a trooper—who is supposed to work as hard as any man on earth—to get the engine of the launch in order again.

The laboratory, being free of explosives, was turned into a depôt for vegetables and fruit for the use of the house, of which Mrs. Farrell kept the key.

Romeo laid the ghosts nightly for the benefit of his father and grandfather, and for a whole week peace reigned upon the school.

Then Rob Changeling reported that by making the most of his time, working early and late, he had succeeded in getting the launch ready for sea, and Jim waited on Mr. Farrell to know if the proposed trip to Gibraltar should be undertaken.

"Certainly *not*," was the decided answer. "Of what service would it be?"

"I thought, sir," said Jim, "that it would be as well for the recent facts to be known."

"Why?"

"Well, sir, on any future occasion of a similar nature they would be prepared to assist us."

"Gordon," said Mr. Farrell, reproachfully, "I am

surprised at you. Needless alarm can only bring the school into contempt. From the first I proposed to act entirely on my own judgment, and I cannot depart from it now. There is, I assure you, no cause for fear. Take my word for it."

"Do not forget the murder of Mr. Stebbing, sir," urged Jim.

"I have not forgotten it—how can I?" replied Mr. Farrell. "It is a matter that must be left to me to report."

"Very well, sir," said Jim, not dreaming that it was the intention of the schoolmaster to do anything further in it.

Not another word was exchanged between them on the subject, but that night Jim summoned the Council of Ten to meet before breakfast on the following morning at the castle.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE HOLIDAYS AT HAND.



WHATEVER the deliberations of the council may have been, we must for the present pass them by.

There was now one absorbing topic on the minds of the majority of the boys, and that was—the holidays were at hand.

It is true they would have to spend them on the island, but that was part of the agreement entered into by their parents and guardians, and the schoolmaster.

Of course, if a boy was weary of the life he could leave, but getting away was a matter of difficulty and great expense, except at stated times, when Mr. Farrell arranged for those leaving to be taken on to Gibraltar, and thence conveyed home by ordinary passenger ship.

On these occasions there had hitherto been other pupils awaiting the launch here, coming by certain vessels as appointed.

But the holiday time was one of freedom. Within a certain limit, picnics and exploring parties were allowed. Camping out could also be indulged in, and on this occasion it was understood that some of the elder boys, accompanied by one or more of the men, would be permitted to explore the hitherto forbidden wood.

And the cave discovered in the chine was also reserved for holiday exploration, for it pleased Mr. Farrell to so arrange it.

"That place will not run away," he said, in response to a request from Morse and others to be allowed to

visit it, "and being open for a time will cleanse it of the foul gases therein at the time it was opened up. Possibly I may think it desirable to visit it prior to my giving permission, but I will not make sure about that."

In restraining the boys, he omitted to put a veto on the men visiting it, and there was one who especially desired to penetrate the mysteries of the cave, for he had got it into his head that some vast treasure was surely hidden there.

This was Old Chorker, but not being endowed with more courage than was wanted on ordinary occasions, he dared not venture alone. Who, then, among his fellow men could he ask to accompany him?

He thought of Rob Changeling, and rejected him as a scoffer and scorner of better men than himself—including Chorker, of course. Then he pondered on the advisability of getting Martin to go, but there was no love lost between him and Martin. When the treasure was found, he might be disposed to claim it all. From him he carried his mind to the rest of the working masters, and found none suitable. Weighed in the balance, they all lacked something. Finally his mind turned to Romeo.

Here was the person who would be most suitable.

Romeo was tall and strong; he was also simple, and when it came to dividing the spoil a man of Chorker's ability could easily bamboozle him out of one-half of his share. Yes, Romeo was the very man.

So Romeo was approached by the wary Chorker, and his mind having been inflamed by a prospect of future wealth, easily acquired, he readily fell in with the proposal.

As it was known that the boys would be free to go to the cave on the very first day of the holidays, Chorker elected to visit it the night before.

"We'll clean the place out, Romeo, afore they gets there," said Chorker—he sat in the scullery upon a table, swinging his legs about—"and so get the laugh of them."

"Wat yer goin' to do wif de money?" inquired Romeo.

"Bury it in the sand till we can cut the business of playing slave to Farrell," answered Chorker. "You leave it to me. And mind this: not a word to your father or the old man."

Romeo had no intention of revealing the secret entrusted to him, and said so. Then he fetched a mug of table-beer, and they drank success to the expedition.

About two days before the actual breaking-up another mailboat was expected, by which letters could be sent home. The boys were enjoined not to say a word about their previous loss, but to write as if nothing had happened.

"It will only needlessly alarm your friends," he said. "Boys, I ask you to give your word of honour that you will not mention it."

They could do no less, and they gave it, and, what is more, kept it.

Practically on the morrow nothing would be done beyond calling the school together to listen to the half-yearly address of the schoolmaster, and then they would be dismissed.

Blessed thought! For six long weeks nothing to do but to idle about the island, boat on the sea, and play at the various games much dearer to their hearts than any lessons could ever be.

The usual routine of the school was laid aside. Its ordinary quietude was no more. All in the big house shared in the ferment of the boys.

Save two.

These were Chorker and Romeo, who were thinking of something of more importance than holidays of six weeks' duration, for were they not about to get possession of the means by which they would be able to make the rest of their days a round of recreation?

By what mental process Chorker arrived at this conclusion is no affair of ours. He arrived at it, and that statement must suffice.

As for Romeo, he accepted Chorker's theory as a fact, swallowing his assertions as he would a shrimp, head and tail.

The pair were preparing for their venture into the cave, Chorker making a bundle of torches of rope and tar, and Romeo purloining such food as he could safely lay his hands on, to be partaken of within the cave.

He had also appropriated a bottle of strong drink from the chifonier in the master's dining-room. In short, the precious pair intended making a night of it.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MISSING ROMEO.—MIDNIGHT SPECTRES.



"WAR dat boy Romeo?" asked Macbeth, as he entered the kitchen about half-past eight in the evening.

"Not seen him dis hour," answered Hamlet.

"'Spect he shuffled out to put de layin' ob supper on him ole granfader," muttered

Macbeth, "but perhaps you gib a hand at dat."

Hamlet rose up, muttering threats against his unruly son, who of late had been more troublesome than ever.

"Sumfin' got to be done wid him," he said.

"How you do dat?" inquired Macbeth.

"He want a firmer hand ober him. He got to be made to feel dat he not be boss ob dis show."

"How you do dat?" asked Macbeth again. "You forget dat he de only pusson in de house dat got de power ober dem ghostesses. *We not able to put de cross-sticks down ourselbes.* You forget dat, Hamlet."

For the moment Hamlet had forgotten it. Recalling the important fact, the perspiration burst from his brow, and he rolled his eyes in terror.

"'Pears to me," he said, with a groan, "dat de boy hab got de upper hand ob us. Perhaps it berrer after all to trumperise wid him."

"Whar you get dat word from?" asked Macbeth.

"De massers use it when dey speak ob playing up de oily game."

"Oh, dat so? Den we trumperyise 'cordinly whèn dat boy come back."

The "boy" did not come back, and it fell upon his elders to do his work. The supper over, the boys were allowed to stay up an extra half-hour, which was spent in the dining-room in somewhat riotous mirth. Jim and Morse, having no particular taste for leap-frog or any of the other pursuits the younger boys were indulging in, strolled into the hall, and from thence to the front door, where they saw the two elder negroes outside, anxiously looking up and down.

"What is the matter?" asked Jim.

"Dat boy Romeo out somewhar," replied Macbeth.

"Well," said Morse, "there is no fear of his getting into bad company, is there?"

"It not dat," said Hamlet; "but de boy ought to be home. He tickler wanted. Me and my suspected fader 'bout to go to bed."

"Then go to bed," said Jim. "Romeo will come back soon, without a doubt."

"Dat not posserbil," moaned Hamlet. "Dere reasons why it 'perative for Romeo to be here." Jim remembered the story the absent one had told him about the ghosts and the cross-sticks, and smiled.

"I should not worry about him," he said. "When you go in, leave the door ajar. I am going to stroll with Morse as far as the sea."

Macbeth and Hamlet re-entered the house, and Jim strolled on with his companion. He told him why the two negroes were so anxious for the return of the missing Romeo. Morse laughed heartily.

"What a thing superstition is!" he said; "but it is excusable in a nigger. By the way, I wonder what Romeo is doing out so late?"

"Gone for a bit of night fishing, or something of that sort."

"He is such a prying beggar; he can't help it; and without intending any real harm, he may have gone up to the castle."

"What for?"

"Oh, he knows that I have removed my things there, and it is just possible he may have gone up to get a peep at them."

"I should think," remarked Jim, "that the dose of explosives he had in the chine would have made him shy of them for ever."

"No," said Morse, "niggers soon forget, and Romeo's head is like a sieve. Curiosity is the master emotion within him. He must yield, when it rises in his breast."

"Suppose he has gone to the castle—what then?"

"I did a foolish thing this evening, Jim. After spending some time in arranging my bottles and so on, I came away, leaving the key *in the door*."

"How came you to do it?"

"Sheer forgetfulness. I was thinking out a new idea, and must have come away oblivious of everything else. Now, if Romeo has really gone up there, and should get meddling with certain things he will find there, he will get into trouble, I fear."

"What would be the final result?" asked Jim.

"Well, I should say that if he touches a certain compound, and gets fooling with it, he and the greater part of the castle will go upwards, half-way to the moon."

"Suppose we run up to make sure he is not there?" suggested Jim.

"I was thinking of going up for the key," replied Morse. "It will be safer in any case. You go in, and when the boys ask where I am, you can say that I am busy. I daresay that when I get to my den in the castle, I shall work all night. My new idea is a fizzer, and I am eager to see how it will go."

"But, old man," remonstrated Jim, "you will never think of passing the night up there."

"Why not?" was the quiet reply. "There is no school to-morrow, and a night without sleep won't hurt me."

"But alone, old fellow?"

"I must be alone when I am really at work. I can only endure company when I exhibit results."

"You must have a wonderful nerve," said Jim, admiringly.

"Not more than others," said Morse. "I daresay, as I am going up the path and when I am passing through the gates of the castle, I shall feel a bit of a funk coming over me; but as soon as I am in my laboratory, and at work, I shall forget all else. Now, Jim, time is precious, if Romeo is up yonder. Good-bye. Look for me in the morning."

It was a way with Morse to stop all remonstrance, when he was bent on doing a difficult or dangerous thing, by speeding away; and before Jim could say another word he had vanished in the gloom of the night.

As a lover of research into the more violent qualities of the earth, Morse had few equals of his age in the wide world. On the island he stood alone in that respect. It was an all-absorbing passion with him.

Jim, not feeling so keenly interested, was not at all desirous of passing the night in the castle, although he would have done so if his company had been desired by Morse.

The hall was filled with boys removing their boots and exchanging them for slippers; and the Babel of voices was as the babbling of many brooks. Jim passed through the mass, exchanging a word with one or two here and there, and finally found a place for sitting down on the stairs beside Terry.

"Morse has gone up to the castle experimenting," he said.

"Murder!" exclaimed Terry, "what a nerve he must have!"

"I mention it because he will be missed," said Jim. "It won't do for Nap or any of the masters to know it. They would make a howling row over it."

On one side of the hall there was a long cupboard with sliding doors. Inside its shallow interior were many lines of numbered pigeon-holes, of the class used in railway stations to keep luggage-tickets, only larger. It was there the slippers of the boys were kept, each pair having its own pigeon-hole.

Jim called out for number ninety-three, and in a few moments his slippers came flying over the heads of the noisy boys. He caught them dexterously, thanking his unseen helper.

Then the voices of some of the heads of the dormitories were heard calling for order, and a comparative silence ensued, as the little host hastened to the different rooms.

Owing to their being later than usual, the masters were not long in following them, and by eleven o'clock all except Morse and two others were in bed.

The two were Macbeth and Hamlet, who sat trembling in the kitchen, not daring to go to bed till Romeo should return and with his all-potent hand arrange the cross-sticks as a barrier against ghosts.

Speculation had been freely indulged in by them as to the cause of Romeo's absence, but it all ended in each idea being rejected, until a dread thought came to Macbeth.

It was of such a fearful nature that his white wool quivered on the top of his head.

"Hamlet," he said, with a gasp, "de moral trufe ob dis job hab come to me!"

"What am it?" groaned Hamlet.

"Dem sperrits hab got de boy and tuk him away agen!"

"But he tell us dat he sperrit-proof?"

"He tinkt so," said Macbeth, cunningly, "and

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BREAKING-UP WITHOUT GOING AWAY.



ONE of the first notable incidents of the morning was the waking up of Macbeth, the premier nigger. It occurred between five and six o'clock when he opened his eyes, and, by the aid of a liberal allowance of daylight, beheld the missing Romeo in his bed.

He was sleeping like a lamb with strong musical powers of a nasal order. Having, like the child he was, rolled about his bed until he was hanging over the side, he was giving vent to the limited amount of music of which the nose is capable, with all the power of a wheezy harmonium assisted by a hand-saw.

Macbeth collected his thoughts, and having done so, gave vent to an exclamation of astonishment.

Then he sat up in the bed and looked again, so that there might be no possible mistake about the matter, and, slipping out of bed, aroused Hamlet.

That worthy creature awoke, and without any preliminary announcement or discussion, said:

"It not time to get up yet. De clock am an hour fast."

"Romeo," said Macbeth, in a hushed, solemn way, "am come back!"

Hamlet remembered himself, and sat up in his bed, to behold his offspring.

"Kitjen b'ilers!" he exclaimed; "dere he am, sure 'nuff."

"De sperrits hab brought him back," said Macbeth, in a hushed voice.

Hamlet got out of bed, and they went over to the couch of the sleeping one.

They turned the clothes down as far as his waist, and scanned his dark, muscular chest in search of signs of recent torture. There was nothing to indicate anything in that line.

"Jeruddledum!" exclaimed Macbeth; "but here am a mystelry ob de fust water. Now, de wonder am how he git away from dem?"

It was impossible for the pair to begin their daily labour with the weight of this inscrutable mystery on their breasts. Moreover, it was the customary thing to wake Romeo up and send him down to start the duties of the morning by sweeping the kitchen and laying the fire.

Accordingly, they essayed to wake him. It was no light task, for he was well away in the far-off land of dreams.

Several punches in the ribs not being of any avail they dragged him up in bed, and unitedly shook him, till his head, swaying rapidly to and fro, became quite misty in appearance owing to the rapid oscillation. This had the desired effect, and he opened his eyes.

"S'pose," he said—it was a perennial morning question—"one ob you go down and light de fire for a change?"

"Romeo," said Macbeth, "jes' let us know how you got away from dem."

"From what pussons?" asked Romeo, who, of course, knew nothing about the surmises they had entertained concerning his absence.

"From de sperrits," said his father.

"Neber seen dem," replied Romeo.

"Den," said Macbeth, with sudden wrath, "perhaps you 'splain where you was larse night?"

"Where was I larse night?" said Romeo, repeating the question. "What time?"

"When we come to bed."

"I was wif you," said Romeo, boldly.

His relatives stared at him wrathfully, but he was not disturbed.

"We all come to bed as usual," he continued, "and you see me put de sticks near de freshold. How den de sperrits get at me, anyway?"

"You put de sticks?" cried Macbeth.

"Look outside," answered Romeo, composedly.

Macbeth opened the door, and stared at the landing on the staircase.

"Am dey dere?"

"Dey am."

"Den in de name ob all de lilly pigs, why you say I not come to bed wif you?"

Macbeth stared at Hamlet, who rubbed his woolly pate, and breathed hard.

"What come to you bof?" demanded the indignant Romeo; "am your menkal faculters gone wrong?"

"You sw'ar you was wif us when we come to bed?" said Macbeth.

"Suttinly," answered Romeo, readily.

Both his hearers gasped. This was getting too confusing.

Romeo slowly rolled out upon the floor, and gathering himself up, proceeded to dress.

"Now, den," he said, "put on sumfin, or you ketch cold in you legs."

He was so composed that they could not do less than believe that somehow they had made a mistake.

"But you went out *some* time larse night, eh?" murmured Macbeth.

"Dat so," replied Romeo. "Me went out to lay a few night-lines for sole and plaice for breakfast."

"What time you come in?" groaned Hamlet.

"As near as pusserbil, ten o'clock," said Romeo.

"You two was jes' sittin' down to supper. Dere was a kind ob don't-know-nuffin look in your eyes, so I not talk to you. At de time me tink dat you not see me, so me say nuffin. After supper we all come to bed togedder, and none ob you say a word. You remember dat, ob course?"

"Go down and see to de fire," moaned Macbeth.

Romeo, having dressed with his accustomed speed, left the room. Then the dismayed pair sat down upon his bed.

"Hamlet, what comin' to us?"

"It am all de sperrits. Lor', only tink ob dere playin' dis game on us. We berrer pretend we hab been jokin' wif him. In course we knowed he was home all 'long. Dat de way to put it to him."

And they did so. No time was lost in assuring Romeo that they were well aware of his having returned at the hour he named, but, by way of a jest, they had ignored his presence. Romeo waxed indignant, and said he would not be made the victim of their joking. For once he was ready to forgive them, but if they tried it on again "they might consider themselves handed ober to de ebil sperrits."

Awakening at an early hour, the boys were up and stirring. It was a day when the ordinary discipline of the school was laid aside, and the pupils left to do exactly as they pleased.

The Lord of Misrule was at liberty to reign, if he pleased.

But there was a sense of honour amongst the boys, and they were indisposed to take much advantage of their opportunities.

The largest class-room was the scene of the breaking-up.

It was a huge compartment, with the customary maps upon the walls, but not big enough to allow the scholastic duties of all the school to be conducted in it.

It was, however, capable of holding all the boys for the purpose of hearing the schoolmaster's address, delivered from a high desk, close to which Mrs. Farrell sat with Eveline, who looked distractingly pretty as she lounged in a folding-chair.

After the address the signal was then given, and with a round of cheering the boys broke away and poured out of the room like a torrent of water from a broken reservoir.

The members of the school-band formed outside, and the boys falling behind them, the young musicians struck up a lively air, and marching to and fro ensued, under the eyes of the masters, who stood at the door. Eveline and Mrs. Farrell sat at an upper window enjoying it all.

It was an inspiring scene, and for a time all troublous matters, including the absence of Chorker, who had not been seen all day, were forgotten.

But it was impossible that it should long remain so.

Morse had not as yet mentioned his experiences of the previous night, but the marching being over, he asked Terry to get the Council of Ten to meet him in the castle, and set off to await their coming.

Almost at the same time Martin had called the men together to discuss the long absence of the missing Chorker. They met on the quoit-ground, and he explained his views.

"Something has gone wrong with the old man," he said, "or he would not have been absent from the breaking-up. Although not much loved among us, it is only right that we should look after him in a time of trouble; but, on my life, I don't know where to look for him."

A variety of suggestions were put forward, but nothing came of them.

No one knew which way to go or what to do. The one person who might have helped them was dumb. And his name was Romeo.

CHAPTER XXIX.

UNDER THE LABORATORY.



WITHIN ten minutes after Morse's arrival at the castle he was joined by the rest of the council. They knew it must have been a matter of import for a summons to be sent out to them at such a time.

They at once adjourned to the council-chamber, where Morse described exactly what he had heard.

"If the sound had reached me but once, I might have fancied I was mistaken, but at least half a dozen times I heard it."

"You are great at theories and calculations," said Hillyard. "What is your idea?"

"There is some hollow place under the chamber," answered Morse; "but it is the origin of the noise that I want to get at."

"Have you examined the flooring of the room?" inquired Jim Gordon.

"No."

"Then suppose we do it now?"

Morse looked uneasy. It occurred to him that an examination of his room might disturb his arrangements. Besides, it was dangerous.

"Of course, I have no objection to its being done," he said, "but one cannot be too careful in my place. Indeed, I have practically made up my mind that none but myself shall enter it."

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Accordingly, they essayed to wake him. It was no light task, for he was well away in the far-off land of dreams.

Several punches in the ribs not being of any avail they dragged him up in bed, and unitedly shook him, till his head, swaying rapidly to and fro, became quite misty in appearance owing to the rapid oscillation. This had the desired effect, and he opened his eyes.

"S'pose," he said—it was a perennial morning question—"one ob you go down and light de fire for a change?"

"Romeo," said Macbeth, "jes' let us know how you got away from dem."

"From what pussons?" asked Romeo, who, of course, knew nothing about the surmises they had entertained concerning his absence.

"From de sperrits," said his father.

"Neber seen dem," replied Romeo.

"Den," said Macbeth, with sudden wrath, "perhaps you 'splain where you was larse night?"

"Where was I larse night?" said Romeo, repeating the question. "What time?"

"When we come to bed."

"I was wif you," said Romeo, boldly.

His relatives stared at him wrathfully, but he was not disturbed.

"We all come to bed as usual," he continued, "and you see me put de sticks near de freshold. How den de sperrits get at me, anyway?"

"You put de sticks?" cried Macbeth.

"Look outside," answered Romeo, composedly.

Macbeth opened the door, and stared at the landing on the staircase.

"Am dey dere?"

"Dey am."

"Den in de name ob all de lilly pigs, why you say I not come to bed wif you?"

Macbeth stared at Hamlet, who rubbed his woolly pate, and breathed hard.

"What come to you bof?" demanded the indignant Romeo; "am your menkal faculters gone wrong?"

"You sw'ar you was wif us when we come to bed?" said Macbeth.

"Suttinly," answered Romeo, readily.

Both his hearers gasped. This was getting too confusing.

Romeo slowly rolled out upon the floor, and gathering himself up, proceeded to dress.

"Now, den," he said, "put on sumfin, or you ketch cold in you legs."

He was so composed that they could not do less than believe that somehow they had made a mistake.

"But you went out *some* time larse night, eh?" murmured Macbeth.

"Dat so," replied Romeo. "Me went out to lay a few night-lines for sole and plaice for breakfast."

"What time you come in?" groaned Hamlet.

"As near as pusserbil, ten o'clock," said Romeo.

"You two was jes' sittin' down to supper. Dere was a kind ob don't-know-nuffin look in your eyes, so I not talk to you. At de time me tink dat you not see me, so me say nuffin. After supper we all come to bed togedder, and none ob you say a word. You remember dat, ob course?"

"Go down and see to de fire," moaned Macbeth.

Romeo, having dressed with his accustomed speed, left the room. Then the dismayed pair sat down upon his bed.

"Hamlet, what comin' to us?"

"It am all de sperrits. Lor', only tink ob dere playin' dis game on us. We berrer pretend we hab been jokin' wif him. In course we knowed he was home all 'long. Dat de way to put it to him."

And they did so. No time was lost in assuring Romeo that they were well aware of his having returned at the hour he named, but, by way of a jest, they had ignored his presence. Romeo waxed indignant, and said he would not be made the victim of their joking. For once he was ready to forgive them, but if they tried it on again "they might consider themselves handed ober to de ebil sperrits."

Awakening at an early hour, the boys were up and stirring. It was a day when the ordinary discipline of the school was laid aside, and the pupils left to do exactly as they pleased.

The Lord of Misrule was at liberty to reign, if he pleased.

But there was a sense of honour amongst the boys, and they were indisposed to take much advantage of their opportunities.

The largest class-room was the scene of the breaking-up.

It was a huge compartment, with the customary maps upon the walls, but not big enough to allow the scholastic duties of all the school to be conducted in it.

It was, however, capable of holding all the boys for the purpose of hearing the schoolmaster's address, delivered from a high desk, close to which Mrs. Farrell sat with Eveline, who looked distractingly pretty as she lounged in a folding-chair.

After the address the signal was then given, and with a round of cheering the boys broke away and poured out of the room like a torrent of water from a broken reservoir.

The members of the school-band formed outside, and the boys falling behind them, the young musicians struck up a lively air, and marching to and fro ensued, under the eyes of the masters, who stood at the door. Eveline and Mrs. Farrell sat at an upper window enjoying it all.

It was an inspiring scene, and for a time all troublous matters, including the absence of Chorker, who had not been seen all day, were forgotten.

But it was impossible that it should long remain so. Morse had not as yet mentioned his experiences of the previous night, but the marching being over, he asked Terry to get the Council of Ten to meet him in the castle, and set off to await their coming.

Almost at the same time Martin had called the men together to discuss the long absence of the missing Chorker. They met on the quoit-ground, and he explained his views.

"Something has gone wrong with the old man," he said, "or he would not have been absent from the breaking-up. Although not much loved among us, it is only right that we should look after him in a time of trouble; but, on my life, I don't know where to look for him."

A variety of suggestions were put forward, but nothing came of them.

No one knew which way to go or what to do. The one person who might have helped them was dumb. And his name was Romeo.

CHAPTER XXIX.

UNDER THE LABORATORY.



WITHIN ten minutes after Morse's arrival at the castle he was joined by the rest of the council. They knew it must have been a matter of import for a summons to be sent out to them at such a time.

They at once adjourned to the council-chamber, where Morse described exactly what he had heard.

"If the sound had reached me but once, I might have fancied I was mistaken, but at least half a dozen times I heard it."

"You are great at theories and calculations," said Hillyard. "What is your idea?"

"There is some hollow place under the chamber," answered Morse; "but it is the origin of the noise that I want to get at."

"Have you examined the flooring of the room?" inquired Jim Gordon.

"No."

"Then suppose we do it now?"

Morse looked uneasy. It occurred to him that an examination of his room might disturb his arrangements. Besides, it was dangerous.

"Of course, I have no objection to its being done," he said, "but one cannot be too careful in my place. Indeed, I have practically made up my mind that none but myself shall enter it."

"It is a kindly thought," said Terry, "for in case of a blow-up you will be the only sufferer."

"I shall be glad to examine the room thoroughly, now that it is suggested," said Morse; "but what may I expect to find?"

"I can't tell," said Jim; "but I should think that you will find a defect in the flooring that will enable you to ascertain if there is a hollow below, and the nature of it. Don't you think falling water would make a sound like that you heard?"

"It might, under certain conditions."

"It occurred to me," said Jim, "that there might be a well or tank under the flooring, and the water of the moat suddenly found its way into it. Did you notice how low it is?"

"That may be from evaporation only," said Morse. "Well, I have laid the matter before you fellows, and I will do as has been suggested to me—examine the flooring. I will do it later on in the afternoon, and report this evening. Has anyone heard anything more concerning excursions about the island? Are any parties being formed?"

"I want volunteers to explore the wood with me," said Jim.

"Groby suggested going," said Ganthony.

"I like Groby," said Jim; "but I would rather go without him. All we want is a tent to sleep under—we have several big enough, without being too big, among the stores—and somebody to act as servant for us. Romeo would be the very fellow, if he could be spared."

"Would Farrell consent?" asked Dawson.

"Yes; but with restrictions, of course. But I want no restrictions. If I cannot get leave, I shall go without it. Who joins me? Four or five at the outside is sufficient. I do not want a host."

There was a general declaration of a desire to be one of the party, but Jim said all could not go. They must, *bar* Morse, draw lots for it. Morse he must have in any case.

So lots were drawn, and the "lucky ones," as they were called, to make up five were Terry, Ganthony, and Felton. Jim proposed to start in three days' time, or earlier if it could be arranged. Meanwhile he would think over what they were likely to require.

Then the council broke up, each being enjoined to keep secret the nature of their discussion.

"Bob," said Jim to Morse, as they sauntered down towards the school, "how long will it take you to make me some gunpowder?"

"For what purpose?"

"Shooting game. I am thinking of smuggling away a rifle apiece, and we shall want some ammunition."

"It can be ready in twenty-four hours," said Morse. "I have charcoal enough to make a dozen pounds of gunpowder."

"That will be more than we shall want," said Jim; "and I have lead to make bullets and leaden pellets with. My idea is to start with one day's rations and trust to ourselves for the rest. We can surely find something eatable in the wood."

"There's grunterns there," said Morse, "although they never come near us. But we may be easy on that score. All the islands in the Mediterranean abound in game."

It was noon when they returned to the house, and the clanging of the bell summoned them to dinner. As they expected, Mr. Farrell did not again honour them with his company, and Jim noticed with surprise that there was another absentee from the men's table, in the person of Changeling. With the missing Chorker on his mind, Jim was naturally anxious to learn if his absence could be accounted for.

As soon as he could leave the table he crossed over to the men, and asked Martin what had become of the engineer of the yacht.

"Haven't you heard?" exclaimed Martin, in surprise. "It has been a bit of a secret, but I thought that you would have learned it from Miss Eveline, anyway."

Jim was not going to discuss Eveline with the men, and he quietly asked what Martin meant—to what he was alluding.

"Why," said Martin, "they are gone on a trip in the launch."

"Who are *they*?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Farrell, and Miss Eveline."

"What madness!" exclaimed Jim. "Have they gone for long?"

"A week, I believe. I rather fancy that Mr. Farrell arranged it all without consulting anyone but Changeling, and he swore him to secrecy. They started about twelve, and it struck me that Miss Eveline did not want to go."

"I should think not," said Jim, as he turned away.

This was very startling news to Jim, who saw the folly of the schoolmaster in running a risk by going to sea, absolutely without anyone to assist him, if trouble arose from any quarter.

Changeling was not a bad sort of fellow, but hardly one for an emergency; and what might happen if they fell in with Espardo Reonardo and his gang, Jim did not care to think of.

There was one thing that gave him a gleam of comfort. The launch could steam faster than any felucca could sail, and unless surprised, it would be able to evade a foe. Still it was undoubtedly a rash and stupid thing of Mr. Farrell to do.

During his absence he had appointed Mr. Groby as head of the house, which shut that gentleman out from all holiday keeping for the time being on his own account.

He could not, as he really intended, accompany Jim Gordon and his friends on their exploring expedition in the forest.

But another matter was now exciting general interest—the continued absence of Chorker.

Romeo remained dumb concerning the expedition that had been undertaken the previous evening, and nobody else had the least inkling of it. Where, then, everybody was asking, is Chorker?

The old man rose several degrees in popular favour as the idea of his having met with foul play came to the front. His little virtues increased in bulk, and his many faults were forgotten. Armed with an old shot-gun, Martin headed a party of search, and set out in the afternoon to ascertain, if possible, the fate of the missing one.

Meanwhile Morse went on to the castle to examine the floor of his laboratory, and Jim, Terry, and the others chosen to accompany him into the wood secretly began their preparations for the trip.

A party of the boys went off with Mr. Turner botanising, others took to the boats, some lay about reading, and the place was fairly quiet during the greater portion of the afternoon. Jim fished out a light tent from the stores of rough material, kept in a shed near the workshops, and overhauled it.

Two or three ropes, used as stays, were missing, and a rent wanted repairing, but that was all, and having spread the canvas out upon the ground, he and Terry proceeded to remedy the defects.

While they were thus engaged, Mr. Groby came quietly up, and, unobserved, stood watching them. Presently he startled the boys by inquiring, "What are you going to do with that tent?"

"It will be wanted for the camping out, sir," answered Jim.

"Oh, indeed; and when do you propose to start?"

Jim was silent. He would not tell a lie, and he feared to speak the truth.

"I shall not interfere with you, Gordon," continued Mr. Groby; "but I beg of you to be wary, and not get into trouble."

"Thank you, sir," Jim responded. "Might I ask a favour. Can Romeo be spared to help us?"

"I should say so," was the reply; "now that the holidays are on, and there is so much living in the open air, he can be spared."

Jim again thanked him, and Mr. Groby sauntered away.

"He is a good fellow," said Jim. "He guesses we are up to something, and although he would rather not give us absolute leave, he will not interfere with us."

"And by a side wind," said Terry, "you have got Romeo. Here comes Morse. He looks as if he has something worth hearing to tell us."

CHAPTER XXX.

WHAT HAPPENED TO CHORKER.



MORSE came up and squatted on the ground, clasping his knees with his hand. As Terry had suggested, he seemed to be burdened with news of import but he did not immediately impart it, but first cast a critical eye over the tent.

"I suppose," he said, "that it is big enough for us?"

"For sleeping," replied Jim; "practically we shall live in the open air. Have you had a look round your room?"

"I have; and cleaned it up a bit. It wanted it."

"You have something to tell us?"

"Well, yes; something that may account for the noises I heard, or it may not. There is a trap-door in the floor of my room. It can be raised by using an iron ring fixed in it."

"There is no attempt at secrecy."

"No. It was difficult to move, but that was owing to its having been unused for years. The hinges were rusty, and I had to oil them over and over again before they would budge."

"And what is under the trap?"

"A flight of steps."

"Which you descended, of course, wishing to make the whole discovery your own?"

"I lit a lamp, and as the air seemed perfectly fresh, I started to go down. But I did not venture any distance. There was such an awful moaning going on ever so far under me, that, on my word, I hadn't the grit to continue alone. So I came back to see if any of you fellows would come with me."

"I'm on that job," said Jim; "your lamp is an ordinary one and awkward to carry. Terry, just pop into Martin's shop, and you will find behind the bellows an old stable-lantern. Romeo will give you two or three candles, and matches I have."

Terry scampered away, and Jim, proceeding to roll up the tent, remarked: "That moaning may be nothing more than the wind, but your hesitating to go on alone was excusable."

"It was enough to funk any fellow, hearing that noise," said Morse, "and I am a bit out of nerve, having had a short night."

The tent being rolled up, Jim carried it back to the stores, to remain there until it was wanted. Terry soon appeared with the lantern and candles.

"Romeo is out," he said: "gone with Martin to look for Chorker, I believe. Macbeth gave me the candles."

He and Hamlet are growling about Romeo taking things so easy."

"He has the upper hand of them with the spirits," said Jim, laughing. "As for Chorker, I can't suppose anything serious has happened to him. The old beggar may be sulking somewhere."

They started off for the castle, Terry making one of the company, and Morse led his friends into his room, enjoining them to walk quietly.

"I have some stuff fermenting there, and I don't want it to be disturbed."

"What would be the result?" asked Terry.

"A flare up, perhaps," answered Morse, coolly, "but I can't exactly say."

The "stuff" he referred to was a small quantity of a whitish liquid in an old jam-jar. There was a froth on the top of it.

They walked across the room lightly enough, and Morse pointed out the trap-door lately just under the table, as it originally stood. He had shifted the table aside, so as to get at a ring attached to it. It was a strong ring, and the door was about a yard square. The hinges were greasy with the oil recently applied by Morse. He raised the trap and carefully turned it right back, exposing the darkness and the steps below.

They stood quiet for a moment, listening, but all was still below.

"Leads to some underground vaults, I guess," said Jim, as he held the lantern aloft and led the way down.

The air, they found, was wonderfully pure, and it rather discounted the theory of the steps leading to vaults. Indeed, Jim, ere long, abandoned the idea, and being unable to form another that was feasible, pursued his way, followed by the other two.

All were silent, and they trod softly, with ears on the stretch for sounds, and eyes peering ahead to detect anything that might be dangerous.

But there was nothing but steps, and, strange to say, they went straight down, and not winding, as they expected to find them. Fully a hundred were descended ere they came to level ground in an arched cavern twenty feet wide.

Ahead of them lay an impenetrable darkness, showing that the cave was not limited in extent.

"Having come straight down so far," said Jim, "it naturally follows that we are now outside the region of the castle."

"It is a secret means of communication with the outside. Not secret as far as the castle is concerned, but at the other end. We had better go on. There is no chance of losing our way so long as the passage is a single one."

They had not proceeded far, however, ere they came to where it divided, one division bearing to the right

and the other to the left. They stopped to consider which way they should go.

"Shall we try the right?" said Jim.

"I've a fancy for the left," said Morse.

"Toss for it," suggested Terry.

The light laugh with which this proposal was received was suddenly checked by a moan that came from the left.

They stared at each other, feeling a bit creepy.

"Wa-as it the wind, do you think?" asked Terry, with all his jocularly shaken out of him.

"No," replied Jim; "the wind sighs and moans under certain conditions, but not in that jerky fashion. Now, we must go on or cut it. Which shall it be?"

"On," briefly replied Morse.

Terry nodded assent, and Jim with the light resumed his way.

For a time there was nothing but darkness ahead, and the silence was impressive. Then Morse, who, being just behind Jim, could see better than Jim himself, as he was free of the glare of the light, clutched his leader by the arm.

"Stop!" he gasped. "*There is a man lying yonder!*"

They could all see him now, propped up against the wall, slowly rocking his head to and fro.

For a moment they stared at him, wild-eyed and chilled, and then with one voice they cried out:

"Chorker!"

And Chorker it was, in a state of semi-stupefaction, terrified to the verge of idiocy, by long hours of loneliness spent in the dark.

"Hold the light," cried Jim, handing the lantern to Morse. Then, running up to Chorker, he knelt down beside him.

"Chorker," he said, "here we are. You are all right now."

Chorker turned his head towards them, staring, and slowly the light of recognition came into his eyes.

"Gordon?" he said, in a cracked voice.

"Yes, it is Gordon," was the answer. "How came you here?"

"I suppose," said Chorker, "that you came in as I did, by the mouth of the cave?"

"No, we did not," said Jim. "Never mind how we got here; be thankful that we have turned up to save you."

"Have you brought me anything to eat?" asked Chorker, huskily.

"No. How should we, not knowing whom or what we should find here?"

"And naught to drink?"

"No."

"Well, I'm blowed!"

Chorker got up slowly and painfully, regarding his rescuers with the bitterest expression of face.

SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lam's of Littlecote," etc.

The Island School.



Romeo remained in company with Charley, the bear, which seemed to fight shy of the wreck, glancing at it askance, and refusing to come within twenty yards of it.

"This," he said, "is the second time you've served me in this way. But I'm a forgiving spirit, and I'll say no more about it. How long have I been here?"

"Since last night," curtly answered Jim.

"Last night!" muttered Chorker. "Why, it seemed a fortnight since that busted nigger bolted and left me to fuddle about in the dark, up and down, up and down, enough to drive a man wild. I hollered myself hoarse for a start. But there! it won't interest you to hear of my sufferin's. You don't care what comes of a poor old man. My throat is like a bit of leather."

"You came in by a cave," said Jim—"what cave?"

"The new one diskivered in the chyne."

"Who was with you?"

"That warmint Romeo, I'll——"

"What brought you here?"

"That's nuthin' to you. Here, I want to get 'ome. I'm as holler as a drum for want o' wittles."

"Wait a minute," said Jim.

He drew aside with his companions, and pointed out the inadvisability of letting Chorker into the secret of the means by which they had come to his rescue.

"You locked your door, Morse, I suppose?" he said.

"I did. And I have the key."

"That is all right, then. We had better try to find our way out by the chine. Now, Chorker, we are ready if you are."

"Am I ready?" grunted Chorker. "In course I am. And I considers it werry unfeeling of you to stand there a-talking, when I'm on the verge of going off for want of wittles."

They judged that the way to travel was on ahead; but Chorker, on being consulted, was of opinion they had chosen the wrong route.

"As far as I've got the jography of this blessed place in my mind," he said, "that's the way."

He pointed in the direction they had come, but he was obviously wrong. So Jim was for going straight on.

This they did, and anon came to where the way again divided. Still, this was no great complication, and Jim, having reflected on the way they came, decided to go to the right.

The proof of the soundness of his judgment was soon afforded by the discovery of a small speck of light ahead. The natural inference was that it was the mouth of the cave.

Temporarily the lantern was extinguished to make sure it was daylight ahead, and Jim, remembering his first visit, was sure, on seeing the nature of the speck ahead, of being on the right track. The lantern was then relighted to guide them clear of minor obstacles, in the way of stones and ruts and hollows, and it was not put out again until the opening ahead assumed considerable proportions.

Then the candle was extinguished, and in three minutes more they were in the chine.

Out in the open air.

Even the trio, who had been for a short space of time only in the cave, drew a deep breath of relief. Chorker, with dilated nostrils, inhaled the sweetness of the sunlit atmosphere.

"Blessed if I don't warm up that nigger when I gets hold on him," he said. And that was the only expression of thankfulness that escaped his lips.

He had suffered, without a doubt, but not as a more sensitive man would have done. They found him after having passed a night shouting for help that did not come; pretty well done up, and on the borders of mental disruption. But, in common with other coarse natures, he was speedily himself again.

The original Chorker came back with a rush, and but two thoughts entered his mind. He wanted some food brought, and he desired to be avenged on Romeo, who had deserted him under circumstances that will speedily be made clear.

The party of four descended to the bed of the chine, and walked towards the beach. As they turned out of the narrow way, they came upon Martin with several others of the trade teachers, and last, but not least, the gentle Romeo.

The mutual surprise was, for the moment, overwhelming, and a silence of a few moments ensued. It was broken by Martin.

"So you've found him?" he said, addressing himself to Jim.

"Yes," was the answer, "but it was more by accident than wit. He was in the cave that we unearthed in the chine a short time ago."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE START FOR THE WOOD.



CHORKER cast an evil eye on Romeo, whose countenance wore an almost seraphic expression of innocence. There was such intense hatred in Chorker's glare, that every eye was fixed upon him.

"You warmint!" he exclaimed.

There was nothing in the countenance to show that Romeo took the vituperative word to himself. He looked at Chorker in a dull, non-comprehensive way that excited the further ire of the old man.

"In course," he said, "you don't know what I've

been a-sufferin'? You don't know how it was I've been starvin', apperiently, for about three weeks?"

"Am you redressing youself to *me*?" inquired Romeo.

"Who should I be a-speaking to?" demanded Chorker. "Larst night, when we was in the cave together, who suddenly turned and bolted orf with the torches and every hatom o' wittles?"

"What wittles?" asked Romeo.

"Now, don't you come that game with *me*!" roared Chorker. "You blacking-bottle! You imp of hevil! What did you do it for?"

"What 'bout de time you was lef in dat cave?" asked Romeo, with a cunning leer.

"Nigh on two in the mornin'," answered Chorker; "do you deny it?"

"I was not dere," said Romeo.

"Well, one moment. Didn't we go there about nine o'clock?"

"I was at home 'bout dat time. Ax grandfader Macbeth if I wasn't. Arter supper I went to bed, and was in depose till dis mornin'. Ax my fader Hamlet if it am not so."

"The question is," interposed Martin, "why did either of you go to the cave at all?"

"That," said Chorker, feebly, "is not to the p'int."

"Anyway," rejoined Martin, "we don't want to be bothered about the why and wherefore of it. We thought you were murdered, and made a lot of bother about you."

"Nobody axed you to do it," growled Chorker; "and havin' done it, without bringing me so much as a biscuit, I don't see what you have to brag about."

"Nobody's bragging," said Martin, sternly. "Get along home with you, for an ill-conditioned old skunk!"

"And him to say dat *me* was dere!" exclaimed Romeo—"me! You ax ole Macbeth whar me was. Alser my fader. Gorysmash, what am de ole fool talkin' ob?"

Chorker, snorting and bristling, pegged on ahead, declining to discuss the question further. They let him go, and, their minds being easy concerning the possibility of another tragedy, the rest sauntered on at their leisure.

Jim fell behind with Romeo, who carried himself with an air of injured innocence.

"Romeo!"

"Yes, Massa Gordon."

"What was the idea of visiting the cave?"

"How me tell, Massa Gordon, if me not dere?"

"But you were there."

"If you say so, Massa Gordon, it useless to say de oder way. We was dere 'cause old Chorker tink dere am a lot ob treasure hid in dat cave. He say dat all caves got treasure in dem, 'cos it put down so in de books."

"What books?"

Romeo scratched his head and looked puzzled.

"Me never see dem. Old Chorker say dey say so. But lor! Massa Gordon, dere was no treasure in dat cave, nuffin' but de groun' and de damp and de sperrits. So me say to him, 'Am you comin' out ob dis?'"

"I see; you soon had enough of it?"

"Dat so. He say, 'I am not comin' out ob dis, and you go, on de peddel ob you life.'

"Dat was puttin' on de 'perious wif me," said Romeo, indignantly, "and 'cordin'ly me turn round and walk orf. He holler and I run; den flop I go and put out de torch. Den when this chile come to feel for de box ob matches dey am gone. Derefore dere am nothin' for me to do but to get out ob de cave as soon as me can. But fust de wittles hab to be reposed ob, and me do it, listening to Ole Chorker hollerin' till he fit to bust. After dat, habin' eatin almost eberyting and reposed ob de inside contents ob de bottle, me hab a short sleep. Firanally, wakin' up, me make tracks and come to de mouf ob de cave somehow and get 'long home. Dat de trufe, Massa Gordon, and nuffin' more."

"It strikes me," said Jim, "that one day you will get into serious trouble. But for the present you will understand that you are my servant. Mr. Groby has handed you over to me."

"Dat good business," said Romeo, with a grin. "What you 'bout to do?"

"I will let you know when the time comes," said Jim.

The return of Chorker to the house was an immense relief to all. Not so much on his account, but because it disposed of the mistaken theory of foul play.

He lost no time in making his way to the kitchen, where from an interview with Macbeth and Hamlet he obtained their confirmation of Romeo's story. In return he told them his own, leaving out the treasure part of it.

"There may be two Romeos," he said, in conclusion, "but if there ain't, one of us is a liar."

"You reflexk on dis," said Macbeth, with crushing dignity, "dat we tink as you do, but de liar not in *my family*."

"Give me somethin' to eat," said Chorker, wearily, and they fed him until he was well filled, after which he stole away to his room and slept until the shades of night had fallen.

Nothing was seen of the launch, and early on the following morning Jim climbed up a high point of the land and scanned the sea in search of signs of her. In the horizon there was a smoke-track, but too much of it to emanate from so small a vessel. The launch was not in view.

"*The fool!*" he muttered, and as he mentioned no

names, we must leave the reader to infer whom he was referring to.

Although there was not the real head of the house on the island, things relating to the domestic life of the school went on as well, and even better, without him.

Mr. Groby was a good administrator, and saw that the proper hours for meals were kept, and that they were well served.

Prior to taking advantage of the holidays, Rainstone and Dawson, with their assistants, got in a good stock of fruit and vegetables, and Jim's party completed their preparations for the trip into the wood.

Five rifles were brought out of the armoury, cleaned, and put into thorough order, in a quiet nook out of the way of observation of the rest of the school. Morse got the gunpowder ready, and Jim cast leaden pellets of various sizes. A store of gun-caps was also secured.

Jim did not propose to take a change of clothing beyond a little linen and an extra pair of socks for each, barring Romeo, who had no change at all.

He was instructed to put together a few light cooking utensils, and to carry the tent up to the castle.

This was done on the eve of departure, and at the last moment Romeo was told to be up before dawn, ready to start.

Several other minor expeditions were being planned among the boys, but with them we have nothing to do. They did not in any way bear upon the leading thread of our story.

So well had Jim and his friends managed their preparations, that, outside the Council of Ten, nobody was supposed to know anything of what was going on.

Even the fact that Romeo was going away was a secret. Neither Macbeth nor Hamlet had the least inkling of it.

On the night before the proposed start, Romeo spent the evening with his father and grandfather, and dutifully placed the spell to the ghosts, to keep them out of their room, in the usual place.

Whatever Mr. Groby might have suspected, he said nothing. Nor did he in the least degree do anything to thwart their purpose.

To all appearance he was a good fellow, and so he was in many respects. But he was human, and he had a selfish purpose in allowing Jim to go on what was undoubtedly a somewhat dangerous expedition.

Tent, provisions, guns, and ammunition were all ready in the castle, and there was nothing to do but to rise early in the morning and steal silently away.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A MAN OF PEACE.



WHEN Macbeth awoke on the following morning and saw that the bed of Romeo was empty, he was completely overcome with astonishment. Never in the whole course of his life at the school had he known him to rise without being called.

But he was gone, and he

aroused Hamlet to call his attention to the fact.

"Dat boy am improbing," he said; "he got up dis mornin' wifout being roused up and cussed at."

"Spect he improbing in him all round morals," suggested Hamlet.

So satisfied were they that Romeo had arisen and gone forth, or rather downstairs, to perform the labours of the morning, that they turned over in their beds, and lying awhile "to think," fell asleep again.

From dreams of floating down the stream of some far-off land they were aroused by the voice of Mr. Groby, angrily demanding if they were going to get up that day?

The deputy master was at the door in his dressing-gown, and there were sounds of moving life all over the house.

"Nearly eight o'clock," he cried, "and not one of you stirring."

"Scrumptious Willyum!" cried Macbeth, as he tumbled out of bed. "All right, Massa Groby, we 'bout to come down. Hamlet!"

Hamlet was awake, and as Mr. Groby retired muttering anathemas on the laziness of niggers, the pair bestowed some strong adjectives on Romeo.

"You bet your larse dollar," said Macbeth, "dat he done dis a-puppose. He' nebber easy in his mind onless he lowering us in de eyes ob our s'periors."

When they went down they found that it wanted little more than half an hour to breakfast-time, and nothing had been done. No fire lighted in the kitchen, no cleaning-up—nothing to show that Romeo had made any attempt to perform his regular duties.

Luckily there was very little to do, for the masters were going to have cold meat for their breakfast.

A number of the smallest boys always assisted in laying out the tables, and they now came trooping into the kitchen for the requisite crockery. Mr. Groby also sent in Chorker and Waffle to bear a hand.

"A nice thing," growled Chorker, "when men like me have got to do menial work. Where's that 'ere warmint Romeo?"

"What you call him?" demanded Hamlet, who was cutting bread with a long knife preparatory to buttering.

"Warmint," replied Chorker, curtly.

"You keep a cibil tongue in you head," said Hamlet, "or maybe you get sumfin'. Dern old skunk as you is!"

"Hear, hear!" chorused a dozen of the boys who were engaged in filling two clothes-baskets with cups and saucers.

Chorker, who had risen in one of his worst of humours, crossed the kitchen, and, taking advantage of Hamlet's back being turned to him, bestowed upon him a kick that for a moment took his breath away.

"It's come to something," said Chorker, "when—"

Hamlet wheeled round and charged him like a bull, using his head battering-ram fashion. Chorker was thrown into a basket of crockery, upsetting it, and some of the pieces were broken.

The crash and the shouts of the boys brought Mr. Storeby, the peace-loving undermaster, into the kitchen.

He had been appointed by Mr. Groby to practically fulfil the office of Mrs. Farrell.

He bounced in, and came into a line between Chorker and Hamlet. The former, springing up, went blindly in the direction of the latter, and encountering the undermaster, hit out at him.

The blow was a heavy one, for Chorker was no chicken, and the lover of peace staggered under it. The boys and the two negroes stared aghast.

Mr. Storeby, in a fury, seized the long knife Caesar had dropped, and flourishing it wildly, charged upon Chorker, and would have killed him outright in his sudden rage if Macbeth had not thrown himself upon him.

"Golly, Mas' Storeby," he cried, "what you doing ob?"

"Let me go," was the answer. "I'll murder him!"

But Chorker, becoming conscious of his mistake, had already fled. Mr. Storeby raved for a while, and continued to flourish his weapon, but at length subsided and sat down, white and still.

"Let me be," he said; "I shall be better presently."

Although not a very imposing figure in a general way, Mr. Storeby's face caused a stillness to settle on all there. They were deeply impressed by its intensity of expression, and remembered it in after days.

Presently he got up and passed his hand across his forehead, saying:

"I forgot myself for a moment. But, of course, I was only *playing* when I took up that knife. . . . Hurry up with the work, all of you."

Then he went out of the kitchen, walking as one exhausted.

It was a slight incident, but it bore on the events of the future, and so we record it.

"Who tink it ob him?" exclaimed Macbeth; "wild cats nuffin' to him. But dere, if you want a pusson to show him dander to puffection, you look 'bout you for a man allus talkin' ob peace. If I not been permiskusly for de purpose on de spot, I reckon dat ole Chorker now be breafing him larse."

There was little doubt of it in the minds of all who witnessed the little episode, but there was no time to discuss it, and the morning's work was resumed.

A good many absentees were from the breakfast-table at the appointed time for sitting down, but some of them came straggling in, and the absence of Jim and his friends was hardly noted.

But they were gone on an expedition that was to be of some considerable import to the welfare of the school, and were already in the hitherto unexplored wood.

It was noted by some who had witnessed the scene in the kitchen that Mr. Storeby ate little breakfast, but sat with his head upon his hand most of the time. He had the appearance of one in pain, and when the signal was given by Mr. Groby for the boys to leave table, he stole away, and was seen no more that day.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WITHIN THE WOOD.—THE FIRST NIGHT OF CAMPING OUT.



ROMEO was in his element, and although the burden he had to bear was a far from light one, he carried it on the morning of the first day without complaining.

Within half a mile of the castle the wood most unaccountably thinned, and the trees in about ten acres of ground, instead of standing thickly as at the outset, were dotted about as they are in the open parts of a gentleman's park.

But on the other side of this comparatively open spot the trees were as thick as ever.

Entering this portion of the forest, the young travellers for the first time saw signs of animal life in the form of a litter of wild porkers that were busy grubbing in the soft soil. Jim, having a gun ready loaded, fired into the thick of them, and one of their number was killed.

They tied its legs together and swung it across the barrel of the gun, with the intention of having roast-pig for supper.

From that time they saw many other pigs, big and

little; and one boar with huge tusks, crossing their path, stopped to survey them with his small, evil eyes. But on reflection he evidently thought there were too many to tackle, and went, grunting fiercely, on his way.

In the heat of noon they rested in a magnificent dell where the chestnut-trees had grown to an enormous size, and the fruit in the husks showed a tendency to ripen.

Romeo said they made a good dish, and, having gathered a quantity and lighted a small fire, heroasted them for dessert.

The flavour was voted delicious, but, as Terry remarked, the open air, and an all-round keen sense of enjoyment, probably improved them.

As two hours' halt was desirable, not only on account of the heat of noon, but the necessity of giving Romeo as much rest as possible, they all indulged in a siesta, sitting with their backs to the trunks of the trees—a somewhat rash proceeding, and, but for Jim being a very light sleeper, would have ended disastrously.

He was awakened by a grunting sound, and opening his eyes, saw a wild boar—it might have been the original one already referred to—in the act of charging at the sleeping Romeo, who, in a sitting position, with his head upon his chest, offered a fair mark for the savage beast.

A yell from Jim, of double-extra lung-power, awoke all the sleepers and startled the wild boar. Instead of charging on, he pulled up short, and turned his head to see who it was that had thus checked him.

Fortunately all the boys had their weapons ready loaded, and seizing them, they aimed at the boar, and as Romeo roused from sweet dreams, rolled out of the line of fire, a volley awoke the many echoes of the wood.

Of the five shots four took effect; but, though wounded sorely, the boar had some fight left in him.

He gave his tusks a rubbing on the ground as if to sharpen them, and then charged, making for Terry, who, with commendable activity, got behind a tree.

It was done so neatly that it might have served for a vanishing-trick.

The boar, blind with fury, dashed on, and plunged his strong tusks into the bark of the tree, with a force that broke one off short.

It was his supreme effort, his last bit of fighting on earth, and with a sob of anguish he rolled over in a heap, quivered for a moment all over his body, and then lay still.

"You may come out, Terry," said Morse; "he's done for."

"Whew!" whistled Terry, as he appeared again, "I thought it was all up with me. What a savage brute!"

"We shall have to be wary of the boars," said Jim,

"and it is useless to blink at the fact. It is quite evident they do not like strangers in their domain."

"Wild-bear fry good, Massa Gordon," said Romeo, smacking his lips. "Cook it now and hab it cold for tea."

They all voted it would be acceptable, and while Romeo removed and dressed the fry, the youngsters wandered around, keeping well within hearing, in case another visitor should honour Romeo with his unwelcome attentions. There was a sense of loneliness, although there were five of them, that rather discounted from the grandeur of the forest scene. It seemed, as Terry said, as if the place had never echoed to the footsteps of man. On the whole, they were already beginning to feel life in the wood oppressive.

"Give me big, open spaces," said Morse.

"Where there is plenty of room for a good honest explosion," remarked Joe Ganthony. "Fancy being here when there is an earthquake on. Ugh!"

"Hush!" said Jim. "Listen! What is that?"

They stood still, and from afar off there came a curious, rattling sound. They knew not what to compare it to, but Felton suggested it was a hailstorm in the distance, with the icy stones falling upon hard ground.

"It isn't that," said Morse; "it is more like the chattering of birds."

"It is approaching us, that is certain," said Jim; "coming up like the wind, for it gets louder."

"There's a hollow tree," said Terry; "let us get in."

"You have quite a passion for trees," remarked Ganthony; "first popping round them, and then getting inside."

Anyway, as the sound, or sounds, increased in volume, they thought it prudent to take advantage of the hollow tree, a huge chestnut, with ample room inside the decayed trunk for all.

"Look to your guns," said Jim, quietly; "we may want them."

"All loaded," they said, and, with the triggers at full-cock, they awaited the coming of the origin of the sound.

As it came nearer, the nature of it became apparent. It was a form of chattering such as would come from a host of angry birds, with the difference that it was not so chirpy.

"I'm bothered," muttered Jim, "if I can understand it."

Then the excitement was increased by an additional sound, which had hitherto been smothered by the other one. It was a faint clanking, such as dragging a chain over the ground might create.

While they were wondering at it, a big brown bear hove in sight, hastening along, with his tongue out, and pursued by a shower of sticks and chestnut-fruit.

Around the beast's neck was a well-worn leathern collar, to which was attached a chain about ten feet long, dragging behind him.

The hunted, weary, bitterly savage look on the beast's face was almost comical. He seemed to be more exasperated than terrified, and his retreat was that of one who flies from some beggarly foe it is impossible to get at in fair fight.

And such a foe was hunting him through the wood in the form of hundreds of small Barbary apes, that came tumbling and rolling along over the branches of the trees from the lowest to the highest, as a swarm of flies in pursuit of a cask of sugar.

The air seemed to be positively laden with them, and each and all devoted themselves to worrying that hapless bear, who could only put up with their beggarly assaults and chattering insults, and fly before them.

The bear passed on out of sight, the apes vanished, and the boys came out of their hiding-places to laugh at the spectacle, and wonder how a bear with a chain round its neck could possibly have become an inhabitant of that lonely forest.

"It strikes me, boys," said Morse, "that we shall not crack *that* nut in a hurry."

"I noticed the chain," remarked Jim; "it was bright, with constant dragging on the ground, and it appeared to be worn in places. The brute may have been here for years."

"Or a few days, or even hours only," said Morse; "I have seen that class of fellow being taken round by Normandy peasants. The men teach the brutes all sorts of tricks, and live and sleep with them as chummy as possible."

"But here—*here*," said Jim, "what is the good of a performing bear *here*?"

"Well, he is here," replied Morse, "and it useless to speculate. Suppose we get back to Romeo? Although that chattering crew did not go near him, he may have heard the hullabaloo, and been scared half out of his wits."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DESERTED TOWN.—ROMEO ACQUIRES A NEW FRIEND.



ROMEO had heard the sounds, but thought that it was coming rain, and had merely hastened on with his cooking. The fry was done to perfection, and the aroma of it was quite tempting. But as, the boys had already dined, they resisted their carnal promptings, and having assisted Romeo to pack

and resume his burden, they pursued their way through the wood.

Whether the concourse of apes had driven all form of animal life away from the district for the present, is uncertain, but, in fact, nothing of more importance than flies or other insects was seen during the rest of the afternoon.

With occasional halts for rest they kept steadily on, sometimes meeting with fallen trees that barred their way, or dense clumps of undergrowth that they had to go round, because they could not be penetrated. But so good progress did they make, that when the time of sunset drew nigh they judged that they had covered nearly ten miles of ground.

All, indeed, were eager to get out of the wood, and it was with great satisfaction that, towards the close of the afternoon march, they found the tall trunks rapidly thinning.

As there was no moon during the early hours, they took advantage of the last hour of daylight to pitch the tent, so as to have all snug and comfortable for the night. Romeo, meanwhile, prepared the little pig, shot at the beginning of the day, for supper.

Not one of the five young adventurers lacked appetite on ordinary occasions, but their gastronomical powers had been enormously increased by the journey.

"I can appreciate a wolf's feelings," said Terry, as the odour of roast-pig floated on the air and saluted his nostrils. "The alluring joys of scent known to the eager hounds are apparent to me. Hurry up, Romeo, or I shall die of anticipations unfulfilled."

"De ranimal on de p'int ob bein' done," said Romeo.

It was soon ready, and a feast almost as rugged as those of the ancient Britons was partaken of.

Knives they had, but only one fork, used for cooking and carving. There were no plates. Bread, too, was scantily served; but they had an unlimited supply of tender pork—the tenderest they had ever partaken of—with salt, and tea to drink, so that they were filled and more than satisfied.

Although that night was not cold, there were mists in the air, and a fire was both cheerful and needed.

The boys squatted by the tent, talking of those they had left behind them, and sundry other matters, Jim alone being silent.

He was thinking of Eveline and her father and mother at sea, wondering, and fearing as he wondered, if ill had befallen them.

He thought some hard things of Mr. Farrell, but as he did not give them utterance we need not put them on record here.

Romeo, on his haunches, squatted close by with a wooden pipe filled with some sort of leaves he had carefully gathered an hour before, and smoked with an air of intense enjoyment.

"Me spec dat de ole folks miss me at home," he said. "Dey got to do all de work now, and lay dere own sperrits. Goridledum! It serb dem right anyway."

"Why do you stand their nonsense?" asked Terry; "you are a grown man. Why don't you rebel?"

"Me hab too much fiddlerum piratety," answered Romeo.

"Too much *what*?" exclaimed Terry, aghast.

"He means filial piety," quietly explained Morse.

"You got him right, sure," said Romeo; "but de oder ting near nuf for me."

So the time passed, until it was considered time to turn in, and Romeo made up the last fire for the night. Personally, he meant to sleep near the tent, but in the open air. He explained that he did a lot of that sort of thing at home—"when he went out night-fishing."

So he stretched himself across the opening of the tent, and the boys, with the greater part of their clothing removed, covered themselves up with the light rugs they had brought, and, barring Jim, were soon asleep.

He lay near the entrance, close to Romeo, and through the tree-tops he could see the bright stars twinkling. Jim felt most unaccountably sad as his thoughts wandered homeward.

He called to mind his natural tendency to be an idle boy, and take to the wood and river, rather than to scholastic work, and how it had culminated in his being sent, after much reproof, from a kindly father, to the island school to cure him of his gipsy-like propensities.

But had the island school effected the desired cure? He was afraid, or, rather, he was glad, it had not.

He felt certain, although he would like to see the dear faces at home again and again, that the life there would henceforth be distasteful to him.

And when he had arrived at this conviction a pleasant calm came over him, and he fell asleep.

And they all slept soundly, none awakening until the dawn had come, and a new form of wood-life made apparent to them.

Around the camping party, perched on the tree-tops, were innumerable grey parrots, which seemed to have found the wanderers out, and were discussing them with forcible freedom.

At first there was little sequence or meaning in their chattering apparent, but, by dint of listening closely, Morse declared that some were uttering words in the Spanish tongue, and he had reason to believe that many of them were more florid than polite.

"Do you mean to tell me," said Felton, "that they can talk like human beings?"

"No," answered Morse, "but I reckon that some of those birds have been in captivity, or have had

opportunities for getting out fragments of conversation. Not necessarily now, or even recently, for a parrot often lives to a hundred years, and the words they are uttering now may have been heard by them the better part of a century ago."

"Or they may have learnt them from their grandfathers and grandmothers," said Terry, with mock gravity.

"More unlikely things than *that*," said Morse, in his dry way. "You learnt your language from your father and mother, and, anyway, you are a bit of a parrot."

A general laugh at Terry's expense followed Morse's reply, and at the sound the parrots rose in a body in the air, screaming and wheeling aloft for awhile prior to flying away.

"It is wonderful that we never saw nor heard anything of parrots or monkeys on the other side of the island," remarked Ganthony.

"They naturally keep out of the reach of man," said Jim, "knowing his propensity to kill. Besides, I should not think that they could live half so well in our district, if I may so call it. And again, they may only visit here occasionally, migrating to the other islands round here."

"De monkeys," said Romeo, as he rolled up the tent, "often come ober to de school in de night. Me see 'em."

"And you never mentioned it," exclaimed Terry.

"What de good ob my being branded as a liar, Massa Terry? When a pusson hab lorise him character for trufe, he berrer be buried out of de way."

And Romeo shook his head as if he would rather die a hundred miserable deaths than indulge in any form of falsehood, or speak of that which might cause him to unjustly lose his character for veracity.

Once more in the wood, hastening on, now through denser parts, now where the trees thinned, but still, to their great disappointment, through wood, and nothing but wood, until the morning was almost gone, and they were talking of halting for the noonday rest. Then suddenly a wonderful spectacle, unexpected and startling in its sudden appearance, burst upon them.

They came upon a thick line of bushes, where the trees had thinned almost to a vanishing point, and were obliged to force their way through them, the barrier extending a long way to the right and left.

Jim Gordon was the first through, and the spectacle that saluted his eyes roused his unbounded astonishment.

Practically they had arrived at the end of the wood, although not by any means had they come within sight of the sea. As they afterwards learnt, they were even then a good ten miles from the coast.

The ground before them sank into a hollow, from the base of which uprose a town, built of stone, and

rising in terraces to the summit of an opposite slope. The crown of it beyond was covered with additional wood, but the extent of it they could not then tell.

The great thing, the overwhelming sight, was the town.

The houses were strongly and squarely built, squat and square, almost severe in their simplicity, but here and there stood out buildings of considerable pretensions, some intended for public purposes of a municipal or other government nature, and some intended for devotional purposes.

But, in addition to the wondrous and unexpected spectacle, there was a dreadful stillness over all—the stillness of desertion.

Neither to the right nor left, above or below, was there any sign of life. Neither bird nor beast, nor fowl of the air, was to be seen.

It was as a city decimated and ruined by the plague.

But, marvel of marvels! as the young explorers travelled down the slope they saw that it was not a town in ruins. The buildings were old, but they were substantial. They had defied the insidious efforts of time to crumble them away.

Along the lower end was a wall built for defence. It was pierced by several gates, all of which were made of bronze, and, with one exception, remained upon their hinges.

All were open, as if inviting the wanderers to pass in.

The boys halted by one of the gates, and looked about them, silent and wondering.

"Who is good at conundrums?" said Jim, suddenly. "Morse, you can get at the answer as soon as anyone. What is the meaning of this?"

"I cannot tell," said Morse, "as I understood, when Nap hired the island, there were but a few inhabitants scattered round the coast. No mention was made of any inland town, and yet there is one here, where, once upon a time, some ten thousand inhabitants must have dwelt."

"Dey was all whiskered away by de sperrits," said Romeo, suddenly.

"You have spirits on the brain," said Terry. "Well, Jim, shall we go on?"

"I hardly know," answered Jim. "I have read of cities over which the blast of death has blown. This looks as much like one as ever I have heard of. But what will they say of us at the schoolhouse if we shirk it? Still, it seems an uncanny place."

They felt it so, but it seemed ridiculous to shun so simple a task as going in and looking around.

"Romeo," said Jim, "you can pitch the tent outside here."

"Golly, me tankful for dat," exclaimed Romeo, fervently.

"And on our return we shall have some shelter from the sun. Two hours' rest to-day as yesterday."

Then the five boys passed through one of the gates, and Romeo, having selected a spot he considered suitable, proceeded to pitch the tent.

He chose a level piece of ground, about a hundred feet from the gate by which the youngsters had entered the deserted town or city, whichever it had been in times gone by.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DEAD CITY.



HOUSES, churches, high walls, big public buildings, streets, squares, and narrow thoroughfares, but no sign of life.

Such was the place through which, for two hours or more, the wondering five boys wandered.

On every side they discovered evidence of sudden desertion.

Open doors and casements, furniture unremoved, all the little details of household life of a hundred years before in evidence, but nothing to explain why all should have been suddenly left behind.

In the churches—and they visited three—they found the very vessels of sacred office lying on the floor or standing on the altar, and there was a priest's vestment lying in the aisle. Terry stooping to pick it up, it crumbled to dust in his hand.

"I don't think I can stand much more of this," he said. "Jim, what do you think?"

"It is very terrible to think of," answered Jim, "and weighs me down more than the discovery of the skeletons of a slain host could do. Who lived here? Why did they leave so suddenly? Think of it!"

"It won't bear thinking of," said Morse. "Look here, by this seat, an ivory doll—a child's toy. Come away. I have had enough of it."

The sensation of horror inspired by the place could not be shaken off, nor could it be accounted for. The contemplation of ruins alone did not explain it.

They hurried from the church, and descended from street to street by the flights of steps that acted as means of communication from the higher to the lower thoroughfares.

And when they reached the bottom by the open gate through which they entered, it began to move, and slowly swung to. Immediately afterwards, while they stared aghast, another began to move, and presently closed with a clang.

Startled, they stared at each other. Morse was the first to recover himself.

"Don't be alarmed, boys," he said, "there is nothing in it. The wind is rising and has blown them to, as it will blow them open again. The catch doesn't hold. Now, see here, the hinge has a ball at the bottom which is full of oil. They arrange for the working of weathercocks in the same fashion. It is a lasting oil and it cannot escape, so it helps to keep the thing in working order for an incredible time."

"But still it *was* a coincidence," said Terry.

"There is nothing in coincidences," replied Morse. "See, now, the wind has shifted a bit, and the gates begin to swing back again. Don't let us be children. It is nothing. Out you go!"

He walked out boldly, and they followed him. Whether it was the wind or what it was they could not tell, but the fact remained, the gates again immediately closed.

"Blow it!" muttered Felton, "but it is uncanny, say what you like."

"I don't see Romeo about," said Morse, ignoring the remark of Felton.

"He's in the tent, snoozing," said Jim. "Suppose, by way of creating a little diversion of feeling, we go up quietly and give him a scare? Here, I have it. Suppose we all rush into the tent and give a simultaneous yell?"

"The very thing," they said.

Anything was welcome as a diversion that would shake off the strange feeling of oppression created by the contemplation of the deserted city.

The tent was only a short distance off, and laying down their arms, which they had carried throughout their visit to the city, they stole up near to the opening of the tent and listened.

Yes, Romeo was within, and asleep, too, for they could hear him snoring.

"Now, all together," said Jim, as he plunged forward. But only, on getting a peep into the tent, to spring back again.

"Run," he cried, "get your rifles. Quick!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Morse, as they all dashed back for their weapons. "What is the matter now?"

"That bear we saw in the wood *is inside the tent!*" answered Jim.

"Come, none of your double-extra jokes," said Terry.

"It is a fact," said Jim, as he picked up his rifle and examined it; "the brute is lying down beside Romeo with its tongue lolling out."

"Why doesn't it attack him?" asked Ganthony.

"It is the royal disposition of the beast to prey on nothing that doth seem as dead," answered Jim.

"That's Shakespeare; and now I am sure you are joking with us."

"No, indeed," asserted Jim, fervently. "The bit of Shakespeare popped out without my thinking. The brute is there. I saw him, leathern collar, chain, and all."

"Are you sure," asked Felton, with a shiver, "that you did not fancy it? We have all been and got the hump, and people who are a bit——"

"Touched in the head."

"Well, I wasn't going to say that, Jim, but it can stand. They fancy they see all sorts of things."

"Go and look for yourself," said Jim; "but don't shoot. We are more likely to do for Romeo than the brute. I wonder if I can lure him out? Suppose I draw Bruin, and you all let fly into him?"

They promised to do so, and took up a convenient position for the purpose. Jim went to a short distance from the mouth of the tent and again peered in.

To his most profound astonishment he saw that Romeo was awake, sitting up with a petrified expression of face, for which he may be forgiven.

The bear, so far from attacking him, was engaged in acts indicative of playfulness, and wound up by his tenderly licking the hand of Romeo.

The truth flashed on Jim. The bear was as tame as a tabby-cat, and he called out to his friends not to shoot.

Then he went up to the tent and spoke to Romeo, telling him not to be afraid, for the bear would never harm him.

The animal turned its head and looked at him critically. Then, probably making up its mind to be on friendly terms with him, it lolled out its great tongue, and seemed to grin.

"Massa Gordon, what am dis?" asked Romeo, breathlessly.

"It is a tame bear, escaped from somebody or somewhere," answered Jim, "and I do not think you need be afraid of it."

"Golly!" exclaimed Romeo, as he slowly rose up; "but I rader hab nuthin' to do with him."

The bear rubbed its cold nose against his chest, and Romeo, gathering courage, patted the beast upon its head.

Thereupon it stood erect and folded him in its huge paws.

The look on Romeo's face at that moment was a thing to be remembered.

Mortal fear, doubt, and a sense of his being somehow a hero, all combined to make his face one of the strange pictures of life. Jim laughed, in spite of the fears he had that the bear would suddenly give Romeo a hug and deprive him of his breath for good and all.

The other boys crept up, and peering in, gazed upon the astounding scene.

Having tenderly hugged Romeo for a minute or so, Bruin let him go, and sank down on all-fours again.

"Massa Gordon," said Romeo, "me neber be 'fraid ob him any more."

A tendency to back out of the way as the bear came forth at the heels of Romeo was to be expected from the boys, but the placid expression of the countenance of the animal finally dispelled all fears, and they gathered round it, patting the huge head and fondling it in other ways, to its unlimited satisfaction.

"Here is an addition to our party we did not expect," said Terry.

On examining the chain they discovered that it was secured to the leathern collar by a simple but effective catch that could easily be undone.

Accordingly they took it off, and Bruin, with a feeling of being free of an incubus, testified his gratitude by capering about like a playful dog.

"The beggar must have dodged about us all the time we have spent in travelling from the spot we saw him first."

This was a reasonable theory, but it was speedily set aside by the evident knowledge of his surroundings.

While Romeo was striking the tent he went in and out the gates of the city hard by, pushing them open with his nose and shutting them with a curious action of his hind-feet that was eminently diverting.

"We must give him a name," suggested Terry.

"I think Charley would fit him," said Morse; "he seems such a lively fellow."

"Charley let him be," assented Jim and the rest, and the bear became Charley from that hour.

Before going forward on their journey they discovered his lair inside a small house just within the gates, and from its appearance it was clear that he had occupied it for a long time past.

Morse, the calculator, deduced therefrom the following theories:

Charley had lived for a long time in the city. Whatever it may have been to human beings in years gone by, it was now a place of refuge for him.

He chose it as a residence as being away from the forest, where he was tormented by those villainous little monkeys.

Living, as most of his tribe does, on nuts and roots, he was obliged to go to the forest at times for food, and it was then he was sometimes subjected to the indignities witnessed by the boys.

He had not traced the party, but on returning home discovered the tent, with Romeo asleep in it, and being a tame bear, accustomed to the society of man, he had hailed the discovery with joy.

Whether Morse was exactly right or not, could never be really known, but it is pretty certain that he nearly hit the mark.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE OLD WRECK ON THE SHORE.



THE journey of the adventurers now lay round a portion of the deserted city and over the wooded hill, beyond which they hoped soon to see the sea again.

But the extent of the wood, hitherto unexplored, was a matter of speculation, and prior to plunging into it a suggestion was made by Terry that one of the party should climb a tall poplar-tree, that reared its head above the scene around with majestic but simple grandeur, and scan the country ahead.

This task Jim undertook, as one having the coolest head, and being the best climber of them all.

At the foot of the tree they accordingly halted, and Jim began the ascent. Charley, sitting on his huge haunches, watched him, with his head on one side, and that red tongue of his lolling out of the right side of his mouth.

He was not only interested, but approved of the feat.

And it was a feat.

A poplar-tree grows closely, without any spreading branches, so that he who would climb it must have a head that will not be affected by a clear downward glance from a great height. It naturally sways also on the slightest provocation.

But Jim took things coolly, and ascended it until he got to the very summit, where the slender top visibly bent under his weight.

The spectacle sent a thrill through the watchers, and Romeo was so moved by it that he let off little gasps like the intermittent puffs of an old stationary steam-engine.

"Loramassy!" he exclaimed, "if he let go jest once!"

The remark, unfinished as it was, sufficed to send a thrill through his hearers, and involuntarily Morse turned his head away for a few moments. He dreaded hearing some exclamation of alarm from the others, but they were silent, and when he lifted his eyes again Jim was coming rapidly down.

He alighted upon the ground without having "turned a hair," and making no reference to the perilous nature of his journey, pointed to the left, and said

"The sea is nearest to us there. I reckon it is about seven miles away, and there is something that looks like a portion of a wrecked vessel upon the shore."

The bare mention of a wreck was sufficient to excite the keenest interest in the boys. Jim could only say it *was* a wreck, for it was too far away for him to be sure whether it was that of a steamer or a sailing vessel. Very little more than the hull remained.

Once more they plunged into the wood, and keeping as near as they were able, in a bee-line, were soon upon the opposite side of it, standing on the summit of a cliff with a belt of golden sand below them. A quarter of a mile to the right lay the wreck Jim had spoken of.

"It has been here some years," said Morse. "She's a wooden vessel, and see how bleached her timbers are!"

In the sunlight they looked as white as snow. There was no doubt that several summers had passed over her deck since she first stranded there.

Fortunately, the cliffs along the shore were not all perpendicular. In places they sloped considerably, owing to landslips, and a descent to the shore was easily effected.

On arriving at the wreck, Morse's expressed opinion received confirmation. There was no doubt it had been there three or four years at the very least.

The name, however, was still visible on her bows. It was the "*Caligula*," and evidently a Spanish vessel.

She lay across a rock that only just peered above the placid sea, with her back broken, so that the stern hung low in the water.

It was by means of the opening made amidships by her breaking in two that the boys gained easy access to the interior of the vessel.

Romeo remained outside in company with Charley, who seemed to fight shy of the wreck, glancing at it askance, and refusing to come within twenty feet of it.

The appearance of the vessel showed that, beyond being wrecked and rent in twain, she had suffered no great harm. Her fittings forward were intact, and a cursory examination of the hold showed that it was full of boxes and bales.

The aft main cabin was half filled with water, which had found its way in during rougher weather, and been unable to escape.

It was here the boys found a lot of coloured clothing, ornamented with spangles, floating about. A quantity of the same material also hung upon the sides of the cabin.

The boys were puzzled for a time to make out who were the original owners of this peculiar attire, but Morse hit upon a probable solution of the problem.

"There were a number of circus performers, or a company of that nature, on board," he said.

"Which may also account for Charley's presence on the island," suggested Terry.

Both ideas were so reasonable that they were accepted as the truth. But the fact remained that

no bodies could be found in the vessel, nor any indication of the dead on the shore around the wreck.

That was a thing they could only accept as it was as an insoluble puzzle, and they did not indulge in vain speculations. Whoever had been originally on board could have no present knowledge of the position of the vessel, even if they were alive.

"The '*Caligula*,'" said Terry, "has long been lost to its owners, and with us findings is keepings."

There were now upon a side of the island facing the mainland, which was about sixty miles away, as near as the boys could judge. Owing to there being no town or harbour in that direction, very few vessels ever came past the spot. It is doubtful if even the fishing-boats visited it.

At any rate, they had not done so for years. If they had been there the cargo of the "*Caligula*" could hardly have remained intact.

"I think," said Jim, after their casual inspection was finished, "that we can very well pass a week here."

Nothing could be more delightful. What could be better in harmony with the love of adventure and research so strong in the young than spending a few days in overhauling the contents of the wreck? What possible treasures might they not unearth?

Romeo pitched the tent between the vessel and the cliffs, and soon obtained materials for a fire from the ship.

With the remains of the roast-pig they made a meal, and Charley, not finding anything to his taste, went off in search of food for himself.

He scaled the cliff, and at first it was feared he would not return; but at dusk he came back and rejoined them as a dog might have done.

Meanwhile the adventurous party had rested after the fatigues of the day, reserving themselves for the morrow to enter upon the more complete overhauling of the "*Caligula*."

In this prospective delight all else was forgotten. Even Jim ceased for the time to think of Eveline being in danger.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN UNEXPECTED EVENT.



THEY were awake right early. While yet the shadows of the night lingered over the sea the boys were stirring, and Romeo, with Charley, busy making preparations for the day.

Charley made a very good light porter, for on Morse throwing some planks for firing out of the vessel, the

intelligent beast carried them one by one to Romeo. He also conveyed to him tools and sundry necessities likewise obtained from the interior of the wreck.

On examining the cargo, it was found that it was wine and oil to a great extent. Having opened sample-cases, they were able to tell the contents of others by the marks thereon. But of course they could not examine all during the course of a single day.

Nor did they give their whole time to it. There was the supply of food to be thought of, and in the afternoon Terry and Felton searched along the shore for shell-fish, while Jim and Morse went up to the woods with their guns. Ganthony accompanied them with a sack, to be filled with roots and wild fruit for Charley's use.

In the course of two hours the bearers of the guns secured half a dozen birds bearing a strong resemblance to our English pheasant, and another young porker they came upon with his nose buried in the soil in search of the edible truffle.

Here was provision for two days, and they returned to camp, where Terry and Felton were engaged in testing the various shell-fish, mostly of the mussel species, they had brought back with them.

Romeo was cooking them in a pan he held over a wood fire, and roast-mussel was voted to be very good eating.

Among the variety of wines they found one that was exceedingly light and palatable, and it proved to be a welcome addition to the evening meal.

When that was partaken of, they lay down upon the sands at ease, and, like the lotus-eaters,

"Betwixt the sun and moon."

And all at once they sang:

"Our island home is beyond the sea,
We will return no more."

It was Terry who started singing, and one song led to another. Whether there was a chorus proper or not, they put one in; for their hearts were light, and no cloud was in the sky or in their thoughts.

It was a time of infinite satisfaction to all. Romeo, with his pipe of herbs, joined in the singing, and Charley, with his nose between his huge fore-paws, grunted as much in harmony with the melody as bear could be expected to do.

It was a night they all long remembered, with its still air, a sea that scarcely heaved its watery surface, and the sky spangled thickly with the glorious stars.

"I could live like this for ever!" breathed Terry. "Think of school after this!"

"I feel too lazy to think," said Ganthony. "All we want is somebody playing the Spanish guitar to make it heavenly."

"Is it really such a beautiful instrument?" asked Morse, doubtfully. "I have never heard it played."

"Like all instruments," said Jim, "you want to hear it at the proper time and in the proper place. The guitar, I fancy, wants night, old Spanish buildings, and a spooney chap twanging it."

"One cannot imagine a Spaniard blowing a cornopean," remarked Felton, "nor an Irishman performing on the guitar. Jim is right. You must have the proper surroundings, or the thing won't catch on."

At this moment, just when they were all placidly talking in a half-dreamy way, Charley startled them by sitting up and snorting loudly.

Then he got upon all-fours, and stretching his neck, stared up the beach.

Nothing could be seen then, for the fire was out and there was no light; but Charley suspected something, if he could not see it. Slowly he stretched out his forefeet, and thrusting his head forward, he remained a statuesque picture for awhile, watched by the party with a silent, breathless interest.

They knew not what to make of his strange conduct, and when he presently moved stealthily on and vanished from their sight, they sat still, dumb with amazement.

"Something or somebody is about," whispered Joe, breaking the stillness.

"Dat ole Charley," murmured Romeo, "am up to snuff. Perhaps him see a lion or *anoder* bear. Den dere be a bit ob a fight."

"Be quiet for a time," said Jim; "and you fellows, get your guns ready for an emergency. I don't like this strange behaviour of Charley. Little as we have seen of him, it is certain that he has lots of intelligence. Get me my gun, Romeo, and all of you, while I am away, be as quiet as possible."

"What are you going to do?" asked Morse, aside.

"I am going on the track of Charley. He is making along the shore, and, at the pace he started, I shall soon overtake him."

"Let me come with you."

"No, you stay here and look after the others. Should you hear me fire, make tracks for the top of the cliff, and there await me."

"But, Jim——"

"Excuse me if I take a leaf from your book and vanish without further argument."

Romeo handed out Jim's gun, and taking it, he glided away on the track of the bear.

"This cuts into the harmony of the evening," said Terry, dolorously, a few minutes later. "What on earth can it be?"

"Nothing much, I think," replied Morse, hopefully.

Everything was very still for a time, and then from some distant spot there faintly arose the sound of one in agony.

In the ultra stillness of the night the cry seemed to come from a tremendous distance. It might, in a

sense, have descended from the stars aloft, and Romeo, squatting on the sand, bowed his head, muttering:

"It am de voice ob a sperrit!"

"Strange," muttered Morse, looking at his awe-stricken figure. "He humbugs the other niggers on that score, and yet he is as deeply soaked in superstition as they are. Spirits! There are no such things on earth."

But for all that he felt that there was something uncanny in the night air.

It was half an hour later when Jim returned.

He had been unable to see anything of Charley, and after uselessly wandering up and down, had given him up. He had not heard the strange, far-off cry that fell upon the ears of those he left beside the wreck.

"You are sure it was not imagination?" he asked.

"We all heard it," simply answered Morse.

It might have been close upon another half-hour later when Charley came softly back and lay down, a little apart from the anxious watchers. And there was an air of contentment in the way he laid his huge jaws upon his forefeet and sighed.

But they could make nothing of him, and as the hour was growing late, Jim suggested retiring to sleep.

"Would it not be as well for one of us to keep watch?" asked Morse.

"Where will you find a better sentry than our friend there?" asked Jim, pointing towards Charley.

"True," said Morse, and they all went inside the tent and lay down, imbued with the conviction that while the bear was nigh no unexpected foe could steal down upon them.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MORE THAN ONE SURPRISE.



IT was a fortunate thing that early in the morning Jim was up and stirring. Before the others were awake, he was out of the tent and strolling along the beach in the direction he had taken overnight.

Charley followed him a little way, and then turned to the tent again. The brute appeared to be uneasy, and even while returning, looked back at Jim as if inviting him to retrace his steps.

A mile from the wreck there was a bend in the course of the beach, and the sands beyond were hidden by a projecting cliff that was in calm weather

lapped by the sea. In rough times it would be impassable.

Jim took the precaution to approach this jutting cliff warily, for which he had good reason to congratulate himself.

As he peered round it he saw there was a sandy semicircular arena beyond, and there were fully a score of men awake and gathered round some object, which at first Jim was unable to make out the nature of.

These men were attired in the dress of Spanish fishermen, of the class he had seen in the company of Espardo Reonardi. He almost expected to behold that worthy in their company; but on scanning them over he saw they were all strangers.

As yet it was not light enough to make out very small objects a distance away; but, although the features of the men were indistinct, he was certain he had never seen one of them before.

Hauled up on the sands was a small boat, and a short way out a fishing-boat of some pretensions as to size rode at anchor. It was a decked one, with a double-mast.

"Smugglers," thought Jim; "but what on earth are they so intently gazing on?"

The gestures indulged in by the group expressed anger or grief, and as the men parted, and some of them moved towards the stranded boat, Jim saw what it was that troubled them.

Stretched on the sands was the body of a man, one of their own class, and his attitude was that of one who has been crushed by a heavy fall.

But it flashed upon Jim that his death—for dead he was—could be attributable to another source, viz., Charley.

So many things pointed to the probability of the conjecture being correct.

The stealthy way the bear went away on the previous night, and his quiet, satisfied air when he returned, were suggestive of some work being done which the animal, in its dull way, prided itself upon.

By the gestures of the body of men it was apparent, too, that the cause of their comrade's death was a mystery to them.

But the great thing Jim had to think of was the fact that the life he had designed to spend on that side of the island for a week or so was no longer possible.

It was true that the smugglers—he was certain that was their calling—might go away without discovering the presence of himself and friends, but the chances were heavily against it.

And suppose they were discovered; would not these strangers lay the death of their comrade to the charge of the boys, and seek revenge?

One thing must be done for certain. The camp on

the lower ground must be abandoned, and they must retreat to the woods.

And, moreover, the movement must be quickly carried out, or ere long it might be too late.

Jim therefore hastened back, and finding all aroused, imparted the dismal tidings. It was a great blow, but all felt that a retreat was imperative.

So the tent was struck, and with as much speed as they could command, they ascended the cliff and took refuge in the wood.

The boat of the smugglers on the shore was hidden by the projecting land, and, therefore, Jim and his friends were invisible to them.

So far they were safe, and a watch was set upon the wreck below, each taking his turn to play the part of scout, lying on the ground near the verge of the cliff, hidden by some low bushy growth.

Nothing was seen of the men for hours. They evidently did not sail away, for if they had their boat would have been seen as soon as it got well out to sea. Nor did any of the men approach the wreck.

It was a time of anxiety for the youngsters, which was heightened when, shortly after noon, Terry on scout duty announced the light smoke of a steamer in the horizon.

It had not been looked for, and Jim, after carefully examining it, said that it was the smoke of a small craft, and might be the launch.

It was bearing down upon the island, and, as far as could be judged, making for the bay where the smugglers had been mourning their lost comrade.

Anon it was recognised. It was the school steam-launch, and the heart of Jim beat tumultuously.

It was strange that it should be in that part of the sea, as the schoolmaster had declared his intention of visiting other islands. For some reason he was rushing into the mouth of the lion.

"Mad as a hatter," said Jim. "How shall we warn him?"

"It can't be done," replied Morse, "for if we signalled to him, those fellows below would see us also, and what chance should we have against that crew?"

"But if Eveline and her parents fall into the clutches of the rascals?"

"Possibly they will not; but if they do, then we must do our best to rescue them, and it can only be done by our lying close."

This was Morse's advice, and it was good. They could all see it, and accordingly they remained concealed, making no sign.

The yacht came straight in, and, to the amazement of the watchers, drew up to the smugglers' boat. Then, and not until then, it was perceived that several men were on her deck, lying at ease close under the side.

And the man who was steering was a stranger, too.

The bitter truth burst upon Jim, with all its terrors. The launch had been captured by an enemy.

At the moment it was not clear who that enemy was. It might be Espardo Reonardo, or some other equally objectionable villain. What, then, had been done with the owner of the boat, his wife and daughter, and Changeling, the engineer?

These were problems not solved for a time. The little boat which the launch trailed behind her was drawn up to the side, and two men from the launch dropped into her. From the watching point our friends had taken up, they could see that much and no more.

It was impossible to identify them. Two strokes of the oars carried them under the cliff, and out of sight.

The mental agony of Jim was very great, and it was a wonder he did not break down. But he kept outwardly calm, although he feared the worst.

The schoolmaster and his wife were probably under the sea, and Eveline a prisoner, to be ultimately forced into a union with that villain Reonardo.

There was the hope that he had fled from justice, or—blessed thought!—that he had been arrested. Should that be the case it was possible that after all no lives had been taken, and the captives were all alive below in the launch, to be held to ransom.

Spanish smugglers now and then do a little brigandage to help them along, and Jim's fond hope was that the capture of the launch was for that purpose and nothing more.

But while there is doubt there is unhappiness, and Jim was very miserable. But, according to his wont, he concealed more than half he felt.

One thing he considered was requisite, and that was he should get into a position where he could watch the band of men in the sandy inlet. To do this he would of course have to shift a mile or so along the cliff.

Recalling the appearance of the sandy inlet, he remembered that the cliff there was almost perpendicular, and once on the summit he would be able to survey them without much chance of being detected, provided he used ordinary caution.

So Jim determined on going thither alone, and confirmed his decision to his friends.

"Keep a sharp lookout," he said, "and if you hear a rumpus, wait a few minutes, and if I am not with you or in sight, make tracks back for the school. I hardly know, with the loss of the launch, what you will do, but I daresay Morse, with Mr. Groby, will be able to hit on something to save the boys from their enemy. I can't stay to think it out now. Look to your weapons, and see that they are in working order. You may want them."

"There is one point," said Morse, "you have for-

gotten. It is possible there may be no rumpus, and yet you get into trouble. You know how I should feel it, Jim, and that I would do anything for you, but it is only right to consider the other boys."

This was said aside in an undertone. Jim laid a hand upon the shoulder of his chum, and smiled.

"There is no need to sacrifice anyone for me. I know you only mention it as one who looks at everything, at all the bearings of a case. If I am not with you, say by midnight, make tracks for the school. Do not worry yourself with the idea of my being dead. At the worst I may only be captured, and the ransom demanded increased thereby."

"You think that is their game, Jim?"

"I feel sure of it. My original fear, that Reonardo has anything to do with these fellows, is, I believe, unfounded."

Jim went his way, skirting the wood and keeping sufficient distance from the verge of the cliff to hide himself from the eyes of anyone on the beach, and so vanished from sight, and Morse took command of those left behind.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PRISONERS ABOARD THE LAUNCH.



Lying at full length on the high cliff over the sandy nook, with his face concealed by the coarse grass, Jim surveyed the scene below.

There were more than twenty men now camped together, and some of their number were engaged in cooking. Half a dozen sat

in a group playing cards, and on the far side, close to the rocks, two men with cigars in their mouths were digging a hole.

The purpose for which that hole was intended was shown by the immediate presence of the body of the dead man, slain, as Jim could not doubt, by Charley, the bear.

Why so pacific a creature should so far exhibit his hatred of a particular person or race Jim could not comprehend, but putting the facts together, he could come to no other conclusion.

The ruffians had no reverence for the dead, even though it was one of their band, presumably a friend. Had it been the body of a dead dog they would have shown as much feeling in reference to it.

There it lay, limp and horrible to look upon, awaiting interment without so much as a handkerchief thrown over the face. The sight inspired Jim with a deep detestation of the whole crew.

In a short time the hole was considered deep enough. Then the dead man was dropped into it, the sand shovelled over him, and the men, tossing the tools aside, joined the card-players.

The whole thing was strongly illustrative of the utter depravity of the band, and it did not give rise to any additional hopeful views concerning the fate of those who must have been captured with the launch.

The card-players were seated close under the cliff, which acted as a sounding-board, and conveyed their voices up to Jim with a clearness that astonished him. But then Jim had never studied acoustics, and in some things where Morse saw nothing to marvel at, he would be the victim of surprise.

They were not talking, as he expected they would be, in Spanish, but in French, and this was a language he could understand. Their purpose seemed to be to conceal the subject of conversation from some of the other members of the band.

Plainly translated, the following is the substance of the matters talked of, which were of especial interest to the listener.

"It was as if the saints favoured us," said a black-bearded man, who, by the addition of jewellery to some considerable value on his fingers and in his ears, appeared to be a leader of the party, "that we fell in with the launch on our way home from the Rock. How rejoiced Reonardo will be!"

"And to think, Giuseppe, that we should find the pretty bird on board. It is a marvel to me that you are so ready to hand her over to Reonardo."

"Can we love two?" demanded Giuseppe. "To me there is more in Lucia di Valo than all others in the wide world. She is to me as sweet as the first breath of the morning."

"But she loves Reonardo."

"She will hate him when he makes this English girl his bride. Perhaps she will kill him, and then her ears will be open to me."

"And he is to meet you here?"

"No—my play, is it not?—no, he is on the other side of the island, where I was to meet him and assist in the capture of his singing bird. But she had left her cage, and I found her at sea. What can I do? Bring her here. Then despatch my boat for Reonardo. He will come, and the priest, or one who wears his robes, will perform the wedding ceremony. Then I leave the happy pair here for a while, and go to Lucia with the news. Behold me, then—a winner of her for my prize!"

"Perhaps," was the doubtful rejoinder.

Jim learnt three things that were welcome from the foregoing. It was certain that Reonardo was not of the party, Giuseppe the smuggler, whom the reader will remember was expected by Reonardo to join him when he was hiding in the chine, knew nothing of

what had befallen his associate, and Eveline and her parents were safe, although prisoners on the launch, from any harm at the hands of those who captured them, for the present at all events.

By-and-by, as the game went on, one of the players made reference to the death of the man who had just been interred. Of his fate they knew nothing, save that he, with others in the smugglers' boat, landed on the previous night, having dropped anchor shortly after sunset, and while they were looking about for driftwood to make a fire later on, he was heard to cry out in the distance.

They called back to him, but getting no response, in fear returned to the boat, where they slept the night through. In the morning they saw him lying on the beach, and, landing, discovered he was dead, "crushed as one squeezes an orange in the hand," said one of the men, but by whom or what they could not tell.

Some were of opinion that he had essayed to climb the cliff to obtain fuel from the wood, and falling, smashed his bones against the lower rocks. But others said it could not be, for there were no bruises. He was as one pressed to death.

Then they talked of hidden monsters of the cave, the dreaded devil-fish and huge sea serpents, looking shudderingly round as they did so, and one and all declared they would not spend the night ashore.

To this Giuseppe responded by declaring that half their number would be expected to sail immediately to take a message from him to Reonardo. The rest would have to camp ashore, whether they willed it or not.

"For behold," he said, "there is not the room for so many pigs on board the launch. Nor will I have one there. The prisoners are secure, the dog of an engineer lashed to his engine, the pretty bird and her friends locked in the cabin. They will be at peace by themselves, and I, to give you heart, will stay ashore with you. If you will it so, you shall drink yourselves stupid, so that neither devil-fish nor serpent will scare you."

"But will they not have us at their mercy if we are drunk?" asked one of the men, as he dealt the cards and carefully scanned his hand. "If we must remain ashore, let us keep sober and be ready to defend ourselves. They say that neither devil-fish nor sea serpent will come near a fire. If we keep a good one burning we shall be safe."

"But who of us must remain?" asked another. "Let there be no favouritism in the matter."

"Draw lots for it," growled Giuseppe.

The cards were cast aside, and all the men called together. It was plain from their manner that they were all ashore, and nobody but the prisoners on the launch.

Giuseppe explained in Spanish what he expected to be done, and after some wrangling the lot-drawing was acceded to.

A bag was made of one of the stocking caps that a few of them wore, and in it were placed a number of stones, half black and half white.

The drawers of the black ones remained on the island, and the lucky ones who found the white stones went away in the boat.

It was plain to the watching Jim that one and all desired to get away from that side of the island, for he who drew a white stone capered with joy, and he who pulled forth a black one cursed most bitterly.

And all the time the launch rocked idly on the sea, with no creature on deck.

The prisoners were well secured; Changeling to his engine, and the Farrell family locked in the small cabin, all bewailing their lot, and not one entertaining the faintest hope of being rescued.

CHAPTER XL.

WHEN THE NIGHT CAME DOWN.



BY the time Jim had obtained so much welcome information, the afternoon was there, and he began to feel those peculiar pangs which are created by a need of food. In his hurry to get nearer to the smugglers, and to ascertain exactly who they were and what they were doing, he had forgotten to bring anything to eat with him.

But he could not go away until the smugglers' boat had departed, and he learnt that it was their intention to set sail as soon as the afternoon breeze arrived. A breath of it was already to be felt on the cliff.

It was while they were waiting for it that Jim learnt something more to interest him, and it may also be so to the reader.

Giuseppe and one of the men, probably in the position of his lieutenant, sat apart from the rest, and, as on the previous occasion, conversed in French.

"Say, now," said the lieutenant, after some casual remarks on the smuggling trade, "how is it that you do not take your prisoners across the island? It is so easy. The way is clear; some wood, perhaps, but it is better than the sea."

"Vampa," said Giuseppe, "you are no Fermenteran, or you would not ask such a question."

"Faith, no. I am a stranger to you. You are a strange people."

"I am one of the persecuted race," said Giuseppe;

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

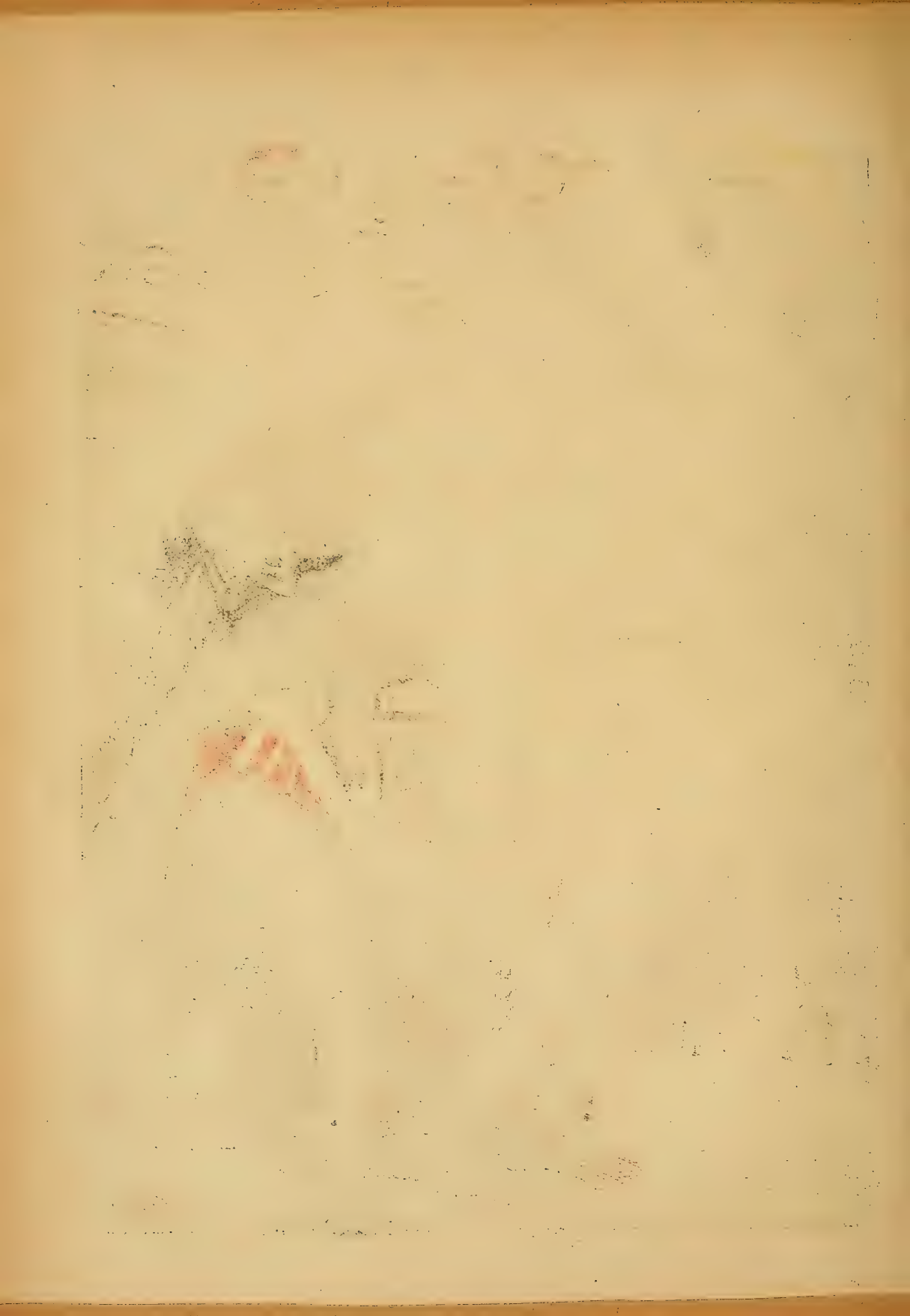
By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



The Island School



They saw them pass through the gate at the bottom of the slope, and momentarily expected to see the "Curse" work upon them.



"our sins were many, centuries ago when this island had its great city. It is here still, but no eye has seen it these many generations, for if one of the Fermentera race enters it, he dies."

"Giuseppo, you jest with me."

"No; it is true. In the centre of the island stands the city of Voga. Long years ago it was filled with our people, who were of a gay nature, and they made it a mart for the devil, performing ceremonies in mockery of all that was good. One morning every creature in the place vanished!"

"Vanished?"

"Ay, they were caught up as in a whirlwind, and borne away to expiate their sins. And over each gate of the city swung a flaming sword, threatening any who dare to enter therein again. A curse was laid upon it, to remain for ever uninhabited and silent as the tomb, and he who dares to enter therein *dies*!"

Vampa stared at Giuseppo, who spoke with an intensity that showed his full belief in the story.

"You doubt me?" he said.

"How can I believe?" asked Vampa.

"Prove and believe," said Giuseppo. "To-morrow we shall stay here, and for more days also, perhaps. In striking straight across the island due south from here, we shall find on the summit of this cliff there is but a belt of wood. You will soon be through it, and then in the distance you will see the accursed city. Go down and visit it if you will, but ere you enter its gates bid adieu to all you love on earth."

"I will go," said Vampa; "for of a surety it is a strange story, and I do not believe it."

Now Jim had already visited the city without coming to an untimely end. So far, the story told by Giuseppo was not terrifying to him, but the rest of the striking narrative might be true.

In many parts of the world deserted cities are to be found whose origin and strange fate are shrouded in mystery.

That legends should spring up and be handed down from generation to generation, and be fully believed in, is natural. And the legend of the city, as told by the Fermentera people, was one of these.

Jim could not dwell upon the matter, for he had present and more pressing affairs to attend to. Anon there was a movement towards the sea by the smugglers.

The lucky drawers of the white stones went on board the sailing craft, and, with their small landing boat trailing behind, sailed away before the increasing afternoon breeze.

The small boat of the launch was still on shore, the sole means of communicating with the land. There was nothing more of importance to note, and revolving a scheme of rescue in his mind, Jim sped back to his friends.

He found them on the alert, watching the retreating smuggler-boat with wondering interest. On seeing Jim they tossed up their caps with joy, for they had got it into their heads that its departure boded no good to him.

"Now, my lads," he said, assuming his captain-of-the-mail-boat tone, "if we are cool and steady all will yet be well. Squat ye on the ground and let me tell you a story. But first of all, Romeo, give me something to eat and drink. I am famishing."

"Things must be looking rosy," whispered Terry to Ganthony, "or Jim would not be in such high spirits. See him pitching into his grub. There's an appetite for you. Nobody in a state of misery could peg away in that style."

Jim, being hopeful as well as hungry, did full justice to the simple viands Romeo was able to set before him. Charley, the bear, watched the partaker with a curiously analytical air, as if he were beginning to see more in Jim than he originally believed in. Finally he went over to Jim's side and placed his huge head upon his knees.

"How are you, old fellow?" said Jim, cheerily.

Charley snuffled a bit, and Jim patted his head. Then the bear settled down by his side, and thenceforth Romeo, though much loved by Charley, was number two in the book.

Jim told his story, and it was listened to with the close attention it was entitled to. Afterwards he laid his plans before his chums.

"One of us," he said, "must, as soon as it is dark, manage to get possession of the small boat belonging to the launch, the 'Dart,' and go on board. His first duty will be to release Changeling, who in ten minutes will have the oil-engine going. Then he must get up steam and head for home. It is necessary that the launch should arrive before Giuseppo or his crew can get there. The chief smuggler, as soon as he finds the launch is gone, will strike across the island to join his friend, whom he still believes to be there. Disappointed, he may be disposed to do some mischief out of sheer spite."

"How long will it take the launch to get home?" asked Morse, thoughtfully.

"More than a day and night, I fear," answered Jim, "as neither Changeling nor myself know the coast thoroughly, and we shall have to give it a widish berth."

"Well, that doesn't matter as far as you are concerned, Jim."

"I am going with the launch."

"Oh!"

"You," continued Jim, "will take command of the rest here, and do your best to worry Giuseppo. You can retreat to Voga, and lay up there until we come to rescue you."

"A nice look-out," said Morse, grimly.

"Don't forget," urged Jim, earnestly, "that if the launch and its occupants are to be rescued, it must be done as I suggest. Giuseppe will certainly strike for the school, or the spot where he appointed to meet Reonardi. Unless he is checked, he will get there in time to surprise the schoolhouse. It is difficult to say to what lengths he will not go. Morse, I rely upon you to do as I wish. At the utmost you will not have more than a week in the old city."

"A city accursed."

"I thought you were not superstitious?"

Morse laughed lightly, and, turning to Terry and the others, asked them what they would do.

"We think Jim has made the only possible arrangement," they said.

"And are you willing to accept me as temporary leader in his place?"

"Certainly," said Terry; "next to Jim, you are the boss of the school."

"All right," said Morse, reflectively, "I am satisfied. Jim, you may make your mind easy. Giuseppe and his men will probably be detained here until you have returned in the launch to the old drum. Furthermore, we will see you off to-night, and if there should be any attempt to detain you, somebody will suffer."

There was not much time to spare. The evening was drawing nigh, and as soon as it was dark enough, the attempt to board the launch ought to be made.

As there was no indication of any of the smugglers straying from their camping ground in the direction of the wreck, they decided to descend to it while there was sufficient daylight to guide them. Romeo and Charley were for the time to be left behind.

But the bear was disposed to resent this arrangement, and when the boys were ready to start, it expressed a strong desire to go with them.

It was not until Jim, imperatively pointing to the tent and bidding it lie down there, that it would leave them. Then, with a whine, it went in and lay down with the most disconsolate expression of countenance ever seen on the face of a beast.

Descending the cliff without anything to disturb them the boys hid behind the wreck until the night had come, and then went on in the direction of the sandy nook.

They were guided to it by the faint glare of a fire above the jutting cliff, which the smugglers had lighted.

It shone up above the jutting promontory of cliff with a dull light that was as the glow of a very distant conflagration. It limned out the solid rock in huge silhouetted form, making it a big blank under the red and yellow of the blaze below, and out of sight. It was as the faint reflection of a hidden inferno.

As with Jim, so with all. They could, unobserved,

by peering round the rock, see what was going on inside the sandy nook.

The smugglers had lighted a fire and were gathered round it, some drinking, others indulging in the undying passion of the Spaniard for gambling, some doing both. The fire lighted up the whole crescent of rock enclosing the sandy floor, and its glare was on the summit of every rippling wave within a mile of the shore.

The boat that belonged to the "Dart" lay on the beach, with the water just lapping the stern. The two oars were visible, their blades sticking up over the sides as they had been carelessly left by those who last came ashore. To get to the boat there was the risk of being seen by some of the men round the fire.

But those nearest had their backs to the sea, and the men facing it had the glare of the fire in their eyes. This much was in favour of anyone making an attempt to reach the little boat. It occurred to Jim that it was so.

"I will get to it as quickly as possible, cover the ground between the men and the boat, and let fly if there is a rush for me. I may not be detected, but the possibility is, one or more may see me."

They understood him. The first need of the situation was that he should get to the boat, and the second one that he should be able to launch it and pull to the "Dart." The moment he was afloat all the odds would be in favour of the rescue of the prisoners.

By the gleam of the fire it could be seen that the smugglers were armed. They had knives and revolvers in their sashes, but no rifles or guns of any description were visible.

Four rifles, even though they were old muzzle-loaders, counted as something of importance against them in a fight. They killed at a longer range than revolvers will.

"Ready!" whispered Jim. "I'm going to make a dash for it."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WORK OF THE NIGHT.



JIM tightened his belt and looked to the cocking of his rifle. He meant to use his weapon with effect in case the emergency should arise.

Nor, it may be said, were his companions less resolute. Averse as they were, by reason of their years, to the shedding of blood and taking life, they saw that any hesitation on their

part, in a supreme moment, might be fatal not only to the welfare of those confined on board the launch, but to themselves also.

In addition, they were not imbued with any strong conviction that the killing of one or more of the group of rascals would be a very serious crime which would embitter their after life.

Jim started, with some sixty yards to run ere he reached the boat. He ran with a light step that would not have attracted attention, but one of the Spaniards, leaning over to expostulate with a brother gambler, was attracted by the gleam of the fire shining on the barrel of his rifle.

From the rifle to Jim himself was an easy transition of sight, and, with a yell of alarm, the smuggler sprang to his feet.

"Strangers!" he cried.

In a moment they were all up, and, springing round, beheld Jim making all speed for the boat. He was then within ten or a dozen yards of it.

Drawing their weapons, they made for him as one man, to capture or kill him.

Jim did not halt to fire, but on reaching the boat, he gave it a violent push off, and as it glided into the sea he leapt into it.

Smart as the action was, he would probably have been captured but for the coolness of his friends.

"Cover them," whispered Morse. "Fire!"

He set the example by levelling his rifle and pulling the trigger. The three others did the same, and three out of the four shots told, bringing the same number of smugglers to the ground.

The rest pulled up short for a few brief moments, which gave Jim time to get the oars into the rowlocks, and, with a few vigorous strokes, to propel the boat into deep water.

That done, he added to the confusion of the smugglers by firing his own weapon, with so good an effect that another of the enemy fell.

Meanwhile, Morse and his assistants had reloaded, and, without delay, fired again. This time, owing to the wildness of aim on the part of Felton and Terry, only two more came to grief.

But it sufficed. The Spaniards were thoroughly alarmed and completely demoralised. In a wild, purposeless way they drew their revolvers, and fired them right and left at random. Jim pulled away out of reach, and his friends, having done all they deemed necessary, beat a retreat.

"They are not likely to follow us," said Morse; "I never saw a lot of fellows so scared in my life. But it's all up with our big find, the 'Caligula.' To-morrow they will, in seeking us, spot her, and the rich haul that should have been ours will be theirs."

"What are they to do with it?" asked Terry.

"They are boxed up on the island."

"So are we for the time," grimly replied Morse. "We are in the position of those who are shut in a place with a number of wild beasts."

"Some are out of it," said Ganthony.

"I hope so. Now, boys, back to Romeo, and after a few hours' rest we will away to the accursed city. On my word, I should like to know the truth about its desolation. Something extraordinary must have occurred to depopulate it."

"You may never know," said Felton.

"I'll get at it from somewhere," said Morse.

They were not pursued. The dismayed smugglers, with a third of their number *hors de combat*, with no real idea of the strength or individuality of their enemies, were thoroughly cowed, and one of the first things they did was to scatter the fire, so as to find a remnant of safety in darkness.

Of their comrades who had fallen, two were killed outright and three wounded, more or less seriously. The latter cried aloud for their comrades to help them, but no notice was taken of their appeal. Each man of the remnant of the crew thought of himself alone.

They sought safety during the night by hiding in such crevices as they could find in the cliffs, and there we will leave them, and follow Jim in the boat.

Owing to the scattering of the fire by the smugglers, the darkness of the night, and there being no light on board the "Dart," he was in some difficulty in finding her.

The dark colour of her hull was also against him, but after pulling round for a while, he, to his joy, saw her looming faintly against the slightly phosphorescent waves.

He drew up to the stern, secured the painter of the boat, and climbed on board without making any noise that could have been heard a dozen yards away.

He knew it was his duty to go to Changeling first, so as to get the "Dart" under way with the least possible delay, but he could not resist just listening at the door of the chief cabin, from whence came sounds of lamentation.

To his surprise, and not a little to his disgust, he discovered that it was Mr. Farrell who was bewailing his hard fate, while Mrs. Farrell and Eveline endeavoured to comfort him.

"Only think of such a fate befalling me," he was saying, as Jim, having softly crept to the bottom of the stairs, placed his ear against the keyhole of the door; "the villains undoubtedly mean to murder me."

"My dear," expostulated Mrs. Farrell, "they would never dare to."

"As they did not do it at first," Eveline was heard to say, "they may not intend going to such an extreme."

"It is all very well for you to talk in that way,"

whined the schoolmaster. "You will come to no harm."

"To no harm?" exclaimed Mrs. Farrell.

"No, for you will probably, after my demise, espouse some Spanish grandee, and Eveline, too. You will soon forget all about me and my miserable fate."

The tone of voice with which he concluded showed that he was on the verge of crying.

"If a Spanish grandee, or a Spanish dandee," said Mrs. Farrell, emphatically, "dared to ask me to marry him, I would scratch his eyes out!"

"Not you," said the schoolmaster; "you would think it an honour."

"Papa is upset," said Eveline; "he won't talk like that when our friends come to our assistance."

"We have not a friend in the world," asserted Mr. Farrell.

Jim waited to hear no more, but stealing softly upstairs, made his way to the narrow companion that led to the engine-room. He stopped at the entrance to listen to some growling that was going on below.

"Only let me get the grab on any Spaniard in the future, I'll scalp him and roast him afterwards. Not that it matters to me, a orphan; but when I thinks of others, my blood biles. And to tie me up to my own engine, too! Adding insult to injury. Blow 'em! Jigger the whole crew!"

It was, of course, Changeling who was thus easing off the steam in his wrath. Jim slipped down the short iron ladder that led to the engine-room, and, assuming a gruff voice, said:

"You are making a nice sort of row there! What do you mean by it?"

"I have got to do something, or go off my head," replied Changeling. "Not a bit o' wittles have I had this day, nor a drop o' drink. Do you call yourselves men, you warmints?"

"Beware lest you suffer for your insolence," returned Jim.

"I don't care for no suffering," said Changeling, bitterly. "Why don't you set the hengine going and make sausage-meat of me?"

"Because," answered Jim, in his natural voice, "I wouldn't harm a friend for the world—at least, not to the extent of cutting him into mincemeat."

"Who's that?" asked Changeling, with a gasp.

"Why, Jim Gordon, of course," replied Jim, as he lighted a match. "Now, don't get excited. Where's the lamp? I see it. There we are, fairly lit up."

He turned to look at Changeling, and for a moment felt inclined to smile. The Spaniards had laid him along the top of the engine, and securely lashed him to the driving-rods. Had the engine been set going he would have been wrenched this way and that, and speedily killed in a most horrible manner.

It was reflection on this possibility that repressed

Jim's smile. He cut the bonds of the half-bewildered Changeling, and assisted him down.

He sank into a sitting position on the low stool he ordinarily occupied when merely keeping an eye on his engine at work, and rubbing his aching limbs, stared at Jim as if he doubted the evidence of his senses.

"You don't seem to understand how I got here?" said Jim.

"I don't," answered Changeling, "but if ever you were welcome to a man as thinks a lot of you, you are at this 'ere moment."

"It doesn't matter how I got here just now," said Jim; "I haven't time to go into it. You shall know everything by-and-by."

Jim struck another match and applied it to the oil-lamp that worked the engine.

"For a moment or two," he said, "I must leave you to look after the engine. Get the steam up as soon as you can. When I have found something to eat and drink I will bring it along. I can get the anchor up without assistance. We must put to sea at once."

"But, Mister Gordon——"

"No time to talk to you now, Changeling. Just keep your head cool and do as I tell you. There are others on board who want looking to."

"All I want," murmured Changeling, "is a drop o' summat to moisten my lips, and I'd be glad for that as soon as I can get it."

"I'll see to you in a minute or two," said Jim.

As the lamp of the engine lighted up the room, Jim, taking with him the hand-lamp, ascended the ladder, and returned to the region of the cabin.

Casting a glance round him, he saw the key of the door hanging on a nail hard by.

He judged it was the key, anyway, and on trying it he discovered he was correct in his surmise.

Unlocking the door, he entered, holding the light over his head.

"Do not be alarmed," he said; "I am a friend, come to help you."

"Jim!" cried Eveline, and on, the impulse of the moment, threw her arms round his neck. But recovering herself immediately, she drew back, blushing deeply. Luckily the glare of the lamp had half-blinded her parents, they having previously been in the dark, and the impulsive act was not observed.

"Gordon," said Mrs. Farrell, after a moment's pause, "how is it you come to help us? We have been treated most offensively by a gang of ruffians."

Mr. Farrell, having by this time pulled himself together, and arrived at the conclusion that somehow he had been rescued from his foes, and was perfectly safe from further insult and injury, proceeded to show the material he was made of.

"There is no need to be agitated, my dear," he said; "our temporary inconvenience is over, and I am much obliged to Gordon for—bringing us a light."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Eveline.

Even Mrs. Farrell, who as a rule adopted her husband's views on every subject, was shocked.

"Napoleon," she said, "I am surprised. We have been threatened by men of the most ruffianly aspect that they would murder us, and Gordon has come to help us. He must be very brave to venture into the vicinity of such villains."

"He is probably backed up by the whole school," said Mr. Farrell, stiffly.

"I am here alone," said Jim, quietly; "but I have no intention of taxing you for any amount of gratitude for what I have done. It is nothing. Only let me warn you, sir, to keep very quiet, as we are not yet out of danger. As soon as the 'Dart' can be got on her way I will ask you to come on deck and take the helm, while I see what food is available. I fear you have been deprived of it for some hours."

"The scoundrels have given us nothing," said Mrs. Farrell.

There was an additional lamp in the cabin, which Jim lighted, and taking up the one he brought with him, he said:

"Please to remain here until I call for you. You hear that? It is your enemies shouting on the beach. They are armed, and at present it is hardly safe to venture on deck."

"I shall remain here," answered Mr. Farrell, tremulously, "to protect my wife and child."

Jim, with a curled lip, turned upon his heel and left the cabin.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE RUN FOR HOME.



GETTING up steam on a small launch, especially where oil-engines are used, is not a very long matter. Before Jim had worked the small capstan in raising the anchor, and got that useful article on board, the steam-pipe was snorting as a preliminary to start. Jim went over to the entrance of the engine-room and asked Changeling how he was getting on.

"Fairly well," was the reply, "only as dry as a lime-kiln."

"I'll moisten you ere long," said Jim.

On the shore the smugglers were shouting and curs-

ing over the success that had attended Jim's rush for the boat, and with it reached the launch.

They realised each moment more and more how serious a matter it was for them. They fired their revolvers in the direction of the launch, and, although more than one bullet struck the water near it, the result was nil, as owing to the distance the power of the missiles was spent.

From the engine-room Jim again went to the cabin and desired Mr. Farrell to come on deck. That dignified gentleman asked Jim if he had forgotten their relative positions.

"No, sir," answered Jim, "but I am perfectly certain that, unless you do as I wish, ere long all on board the 'Dart' will be in a painful position together. I merely wish you, sir, to steer the launch for a quarter of an hour, while I get some refreshment for those who need it."

"Oh, if that is all," said Eveline, quickly, "mamma and I can see to it. We know exactly what there is on board."

"Changeling at the engine needs something," said Jim, in an undertone. "He has been cruelly lashed to it for many hours."

"I will attend to him," said Eveline.

So Jim went on deck to look to the helm, and Mr. Farrell sat in sulky dignity in a corner of the cabin.

Eveline and Mrs. Farrell bustled about, and from the store-room speedily obtained the means of satisfying both hunger and thirst.

The launch got under way, and she had barely headed for sea when Changeling was astounded by the arrival of Eveline in the engine-room with a huge mug of water and some bread-and-butter.

"It is the best we can do for the present," she said.

"Heaven bless yer, miss," said Changeling; "it's a feed fit for a king. Anyway, *you* makes it so. I ain't seen this old engine-hole so bright since I fust put my head in it."

Eveline laughed at this indirect compliment, which was worthy of a courtier of the old school.

Having assured herself that he had all he required for the time, she returned to the deck and joined Jim at the helm, standing by his side for a time in silence.

The "Dart" was now well on her way, speeding out from the shore so as to get ample sea-room ere she headed for the lagoon.

Jim had but an indefinite idea of navigating the launch, but he knew that, so long as he did not absolutely lose sight of the coast, he must eventually arrive at the familiar spot.

"Jim," said Eveline, suddenly "you know I love my father, with all his weaknesses?"

"Assuredly, and quite right," answered Jim

"Then you won't expect me to be severe on him on anybody's account?"

"If you were you would not be Eveline."

"Very well, then. We won't say anything more about it. I am not certain how you came here to help us—indeed, I haven't the least notion—but I am sure you have done a brave thing, and mamma and myself will ever be grateful to you."

"That is enough, and more than enough for me," said Jim.

"I must go now and see to papa's wants. Is there anything I can get for you, Jim?"

"No," he said, "not at present, anyway."

So Eveline left him, and Jim for the next hour was alone, save for the occasional popping up of Changeling's head out of the engine-room to ask him cheerily how he was getting along.

And the answer was always of a cheerful description.

The wind-up of these short confabs was always a remark from Changeling to the effect "that he was letting her rip," meaning thereby that he was making the engines work for all they were worth.

The night as it advanced became very clear, more so than it usually was even in that favoured part of the world. Jim was enabled to make sure of his course by the dark outline of the island and the level line of the horizon in the opposite direction.

For hours Jim kept his post until he began to feel the weight of fatigue. But there was little prospect of relief. By-and-by, however, Changeling came on deck and said, quietly:

"Now, Mr. Gordon, you just have a doss, if only for half an hour. Ever so little sleep is better than none."

"What about the engine?" asked Jim.

"She is set to go alone for the next hour or more," answered Changeling. "I ain't been on the deck lately, have I?"

"Not for the better part of an hour."

"I was having *my* doss then. Now, just you curl up anywhere, and the launch will get along without you for a bit."

Feeling that it would be a very wise thing to do, Jim lay down in the stern, drew a tarpaulin over his legs, and was asleep in a moment.

From that moment he knew nothing more until he was awakened by a sound of wrangling. Opening his eyes, he saw it was the schoolmaster endeavouring to take the wheel from Changeling, who refused to give it up.

"You may be my master," he was saying, "but you run us into one mess, and I'll be bothered if you are going to get us into another."

Jim sprang up, and Mr. Farrell, who, apparently, was not aware of his vicinity, drew back stiffly.

"What is the matter, Changeling?" asked Jim.

"Mr. Farrell wants to head the boat for Gibraltar," replied Changeling.

"I desire to go where I please with my own launch," said Mr. Farrell.

"Excuse me, sir," said Jim, earnestly, "but it is imperative that we go on home."

"Will you tell me why?" demanded the schoolmaster.

"We have left a number of men on the island who intend to go there."

"And what of that?"

"They are a rough lot, as you ought to know, sir, and should they get there before us they will assuredly do some mischief."

"The same old story of unreasonable fear," said Mr. Farrell. "I do not see why my pleasure-trip should be cut short by you."

"Do not forget," said Jim, significantly, "that it has been dangerously shortened already."

The face of the schoolmaster flushed as Jim took the helm and calmly resumed steering, motioning at the same time for Changeling to go down to the engine-room.

He felt as if he had had a good night's rest, and indeed he had slept much longer than he intended, thanks to Changeling's extension of the time, for the first flush of coming day was in the east.

"Do you defy me?" haughtily demanded Mr. Farrell.

Jim was about to say that he would resist the taking of the launch to Gibraltar, but was spared the necessity by the appearance of Eveline from below.

She took her father by the arm, whispered a few words in his ear, and gently pushed him towards the companion.

After a very feeble resistance to her will, he disappeared below, leaving Eveline on deck.

"I wish he would not be so tiresome," she said; "but you must not let him have his own way."

"I do not intend to," serenely answered Jim. "Others have to be considered besides himself."

Eveline sat down on a deck-chair near Jim, with her arm resting on the side of the launch.

"It was because he was so persistent," she said, "that we fell into the hands of those dreadful men. When their boat appeared in sight, coming towards us, both mamma and myself said it would be better to keep right away from them. But they signalled to us, and papa ordered Changeling to stop the engine. He was below, and couldn't see why it was to be done, but of course he obeyed. The monsters steered right up to us, laid hold of the launch with long boat-hooks, and jumped on board. Some went down to the engine-room, and I heard Changeling fighting with them and using rather dreadful language. Papa

didn't fight. He simply walked downstairs when he was told to, and, although I felt as if I could scratch the villains, I thought it better to go with him. Mamma fainted and they brought her down, bundling her into the cabin as if she had been a bale of wool. Then they locked the door, and there we were until you came and rescued us."

"I cannot think they meant to entirely starve you," said Jim; "but they are a cruel lot of villains. I know from what I have overheard that they intend making across the island for the school."

"I am almost ashamed to tell you, Jim," said Eveline; "but you won't talk about it, will you?"

"Not if you wish me to be silent."

"I do wish it. I only tell you so that you may not hesitate to do what is right if papa should be troublesome again. It was his intention to go to Gibraltar, take ship for home, and leave the school to look after itself."

An exclamation of disgust rose to Jim's lips, but he checked it.

"What induced him to think of that?" he asked.

"Oh, he was groaning half the night through about the bother of the school, and how he wished he had never thought of opening it, and what a blessing it would be if he could turn his back upon it for ever."

"But does he not reflect on the consequences of his deserting it now, and leaving all those youngsters to the tender mercies of these half-bred Spanish ruffians?"

"Both mamma and myself said it was not right even to think of it."

"I knew that would be your view. I cannot help wishing, Eveline, that you were in England."

"I feel quite safe when you are near me," said Eveline, naively.

Jim flushed a little as he answered:

"You will come to no harm if I can stand between it and you."

"It is time you had some coffee," said Eveline, rising, "and Changeling, too. I am stewardess, Jim."

"The best we could have. You are sure you do not mind the risk of going back to the school for a little time?"

"As things are, Jim, what could I do? I beg of you not to talk nonsense, but to be your brave self always. See the sun rising there? Isn't it beautiful? Why, there is that dreadful boat again!"

She pointed ahead, where, about a mile away, the smugglers' boat was slowly moving before a dying breeze.

"In half an hour," said Jim, grimly, "she will be becalmed, and we shall be able to leave her behind us. Go down below, Evy. It will fog them considerably to see us go by. And in that fog I shall leave them."

In less than an hour the launch, at a furlong distance, passed the smugglers' boat, and those on board signalled to know what its coming meant; but Jim, taking no heed of the signals, left the ruffians behind him in a mist.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE RETREAT OF MORSE.



GIUSEPPO was not devoid of courage. Though startled by the events of the previous night, and considerably weakened by the death of two of his men and the practical incapacitation of four more, there was still something of the tiger at bay left in him.

After a night of watching, with fitful intervals of sleep, he arose just before daylight from his sandy couch and scaled an accessible portion of the cliff, with the object of getting some knowledge of the strength of the enemy who had thwarted his plans.

He knew by the loss of the boat on the previous night that the launch would also of necessity be a further deprivation, and having despatched his own craft, he was in the fix of a man who had burnt his boats, or had them burnt for him, and would have to fight his way through the island to the friends whom he fondly hoped were on the other side.

Before the sun was fairly up he was back among his men, who were gloomily beginning to bestir themselves for the day.

Of the wounded, one was helpless, having been shot in the knee. The others, having received their injuries in the arms and shoulders, could get about and do something for themselves. The dead lay side by side under the cliff with none so true to them to do them reverence.

Giuseppe came back in a towering rage.

The sense of humiliation was so strong on the man that, as he leapt to the sandy ground and faced his wondering companions, he was at first unable to speak.

"Comrades," he at length gasped out, "I have been aloft"—he threw his hand upward, to indicate that he meant on the summit of the cliff—"and I have seen the enemy—all of them, I think—who routed us last night."

"He is camped above us," remarked one of the men, casting his eyes upward, apprehensively.

"Yes, he is camped there," answered Giuseppe, bitterly. "*Four boys!* By the saints! it fills the air with red when I think of it. Come, now! We have

four men besides myself, sound, wind and limb, and we have some with beggarly wounds that ought not to debar them from fighting boys. *Boys!* Think of it, and from the school—out at play, perhaps, and yet, thanks to them, two of our friends lie there—*dead!* And see Capio, wounded so that he will limp for ever while he lives. Is it not enough to make us curse the hour we were born? Follow me to the spot where I saw the cubs at play.”

They were guided by him up the cliff, each man, including the wounded who were able to walk, carrying his arms. Judging by what Giuseppe had told them, they believed that they had only to go to the spot where four boys were to be found, fall upon them, and avenge their comrades.

But on arriving at the spot where Giuseppe had seen the boys in consultation, it was discovered they had already departed.

“See here,” said the wrathful Giuseppe, “they had a tent here. Mark the holes where the pegs were—and they have taken it with them. Boys carrying a tent must travel slowly. Let us hasten in pursuit. Before noon they will need others to carry them.”

From these words may be gathered the fact that Giuseppe had seen neither Romeo nor the bear, Charley. When creeping up he saw the boys together. The negro and the sagacious brute were in the wood, the former gathering sticks for a fire, and the latter keeping him company.

But the fire was never lighted. Giuseppe, on his way back, was espied by Morse, who promptly gave orders for the tent to be struck and a retreat begun.

With an hour's start he was already well on his way through the wood, making tracks for the dead city.

Giuseppe followed without food or any provision for the comfort of his men, fondly hoping to speedily overtake the four tent-laden boys, and satisfy his thirst for vengeance by slaying them.

It was the sense of his having been made ridiculous that especially embittered him. The loss of men, fighting with men, would have been of little account, but to have been slain by *boys* was inexpressibly mortifying.

We can all of us sooner forgive anything serious than the misery of being made ridiculous.

The trail of the boys was easily followed, not only on account of that which they made on the back journey, but because they kept to that they made on their way thither.

Giuseppe, in hot haste, led the way. Indeed, ere he had gone far he outstripped his men, and for a time they lost sight of him. But suddenly he was seen flying towards them with his very hair bristling with fear.

“Comrades,” he gasped, “the secret of the death of Ethardo is made clear to me.”

Ethardo, it may be said, was the man whom Charley had squeezed to death. The men, huddling together, stared at their leader in affright. Never before had they seen him really overcome with terror.

“Ethardo,” he groaned, with a backward look, “was killed by a monster bear. One who stands high in the back even as the elephant does.”

The little exaggeration he was guilty of was pardonable, for the fact was that he came suddenly upon Charley sitting upright on his haunches and bent on barring the way.

If Giuseppe had not promptly turned and fled, he would probably have met with a fate similar to that of Ethardo.

“But whoever heard of bears in Fermentera?” asked one of the men.

“Is it not enough, fool!” cried Giuseppe, angrily, “that such bears are here? I have seen one, and where there is one is there not two?”

Men generally keep quiet when asked sarcastic question by their superiors, and the smugglers simply shifted their feet about and said nothing.

“See to your arms,” said Giuseppe, in a softer tone, “and follow me. No man alone is a match for a bear, but in numbers there is a prospect of victory.”

He had recovered himself in a measure, now that he was no longer alone, and, with a revolver in his hand, he led them on the route he had previously taken.

On and on they walked without meeting with the bear or seeing anything to account for the presence of a beast of that description. The men eyed each other askance, and seemed to think that their leader was the victim of an hallucination.

Nor was there anything seen to disturb them until, pretty well pumped out, they came to where the trees thinned and they saw a party of boys, with Romeo, tent-laden, hurrying on before them.

A shout of triumph burst from the lips of the men, and they would have rushed forward but for Giuseppe, who called upon them to stop.

“Do you not see where you are?” he cried.

They looked at him wonderingly, and as he pointed down the slope the boys were swiftly traversing, unheeding or unconscious of the vicinity of a foe, and at the bottom of and rising up to the left they saw the City of the Dead.

Some there knew of it by the legend, to others it was as yet a complete mystery.

“Who passes into the gates of yonder city,” said Giuseppe, “is doomed to die accursed.”

Then he went a little forward, and squatting on his haunches, watched in grim silence the march of the boys.

“We may bid farewell to them,” he said, gleefully. “Our wounded comrades and murdered friends are avenged.”

"The bear!" shrieked a voice behind him from one of the men of the group.

They faced about, and beheld Charley approaching at a lumbering trot, with his big tongue lolling out and his eyes fixed upon the men with an expression the very reverse of friendly.

They broke away to the right and left, each man for himself. One essayed to climb a tree, but slipping, fell upon his back, where he lay, yelling in alarm.

Another plunged his head into the thick of a cluster of bushes and prayed to the saints to protect him.

The saints either did not hear or refused to heed him, for Charley, happening to pass close by the would-be hidden man, gave him a smack with his huge paw that extracted from him a shriek of fearful intensity.

Others bolted into the wood and were seen no more for hours.

But Charley was not on murder bent. He had been lingering in the wood in search of food, and was in a hurry to rejoin his friends. So he pursued his way and went lumbering down the slope.

Giuseppe, who had managed to keep fairly cool, watched Charley's progress with interest, for he thought, and fondly hoped, that the beast was bent on attacking the boys. But when he saw him overtake the group and caper about like a pleased dog, he grasped the real position.

"A tame bear," he muttered, and then cursed his own cowardice.

He now felt more humiliated than ever, but drew some satisfaction from the belief that in the City of the Dead the boys would meet their fate.

He saw them pass through the gates at the bottom of the slope, and momentarily expected to see the curse work upon them.

But although he lost sight of the boys a few moments he presently saw them again climbing up a flight of steps that led to a higher thoroughfare.

So far from suffering from any curse, they appeared to be in the highest spirits, and squatting down on the summit of the steps, they proceeded to partake of breakfast, served out to them by Romeo.

"The legend is a lie," muttered Giuseppe. "Fool that I have been to be scared by a tame bear, and to be held back by a belief in an idle tale! But I have them now. Let them but linger till the night comes, and then my time of revenge will have come."

Turning to one of his men, he bade him go with a comrade to gather such fruit and herbs as they could find, with which they could make a shift for food.

"Why not return to the sea?" they asked discontentedly.

"Our way lies across the island," he answered, "but we rest here until to-morrow."

The men obeyed him unwillingly enough, but they knew his disposition to resent anything approaching insubordination, and refrained from openly rebelling against his authority.

Giuseppe conceived a plan of watching through the day, and when the night came down, if the boys were still there, stealing into the city and avenging the death of his men and his own discomfiture.

The old superstitious dread of the city was gone. He saw at last it was but a legendary fraud. The boys who had played such havoc with his plans should die.

CHAPTER XLIV.

MORSE ON THE DEFENSIVE.



WHEN Giuseppe conceived in his mind that he and his men had followed the boys without their suspecting it, he originated a very erroneous idea. Morse and his friends were fully aware of having an enemy on their track.

They expected it to be so from the outset, as the reader is aware. Jim, ere he went for the launch, was certain it would be so. Therefore, when Morse led his party through the wood he was on the alert for signs of the Spainards being in pursuit.

It was Charley, the bear, that seemed to have an instinctive idea all through of something being wrong, and by that same instinct became aware of the approaching foe. By choice the intelligent brute lingered in the rear, and at intervals turned to scan the backward route with critical eye, and ears bent at a listening angle.

At length it took to lingering behind for a time and then trotting back to the boys, and it was on one of these occasions it staggered Giuseppe by awaiting his coming, seated on its haunches, and its huge paws raised in the air.

No doubt in that attitude it was a most formidable-looking beast, and coming as a surprise to the smuggler, his fear was very natural.

It was a yell he uttered that, reaching the ears of Morse, told him that the enemy in verity had followed them.

From that moment Morse was on the alert, without betraying the fact.

"Go on ahead as quickly as you can," he said to his friends, "and don't look back. I can see what is going on behind me without turning my head."

"Have you eyes all over your cranium?" asked Terry.

Morse brought out of his pocket a small case about the size of a crown-piece. Opening it, he showed it contained a small mirror.

"It is made of polished steel," he explained, "concave and highly polished. You may not think it, but there is no looking-glass that will show a reflection of the size so clear as this will do. See here."

He held it up in front of them, and they saw in it a minute but most perfect picture of the scene behind them. All the details were there, limned with an accuracy that was perfectly marvellous.

"As we walk along," said Morse, "I can spot all that goes on in the rear. We need not apprehend being taken by surprise."

It was some hours, as we know, ere Giuseppe was on their track, accompanied by his men; but as soon as the smuggler saw Morse, Morse saw him. While Giuseppe, in happy ignorance of being observed, stood on the verge of the wood, Morse had his eye upon a miniature picture of him, and by his actions could almost interpret his words.

Partaking of that meal by the flight of steps was a deliberate act on the part of Morse to further gull the smuggler, and as the day advanced the tent was pitched on this spot, and everything done to lead Giuseppe to believe that there they would spend the night.

But Morse had no intention of remaining there. Nor did he intend to remain in the city, although he was anxious to explore it. That was a pleasure he looked forward to in days to come, when Reonardo ceased from troubling and Giuseppe was at rest.

It was within half an hour of sunset, and already the orb of day was sinking behind the wood. Romeo, acting under instructions, was boiling some coffee, the boys sat at the mouth of the tent, and Charley lay upon his side in the attitude of a tired dog enjoying the vicinity of the fire.

"Now all listen to me," said Morse. "Romeo, can you hear?"

"Puffeckly," replied Romeo. "Your voice am as clear as Chris'mus."

"Crystal, I suppose you mean?" murmured Morse.

"We all hear," said Terry. "And just spot Charley's left ear cocked up to catch every word."

"I believe the beggar understands," said Ganthony.

"Now to business," resumed Morse. "The original idea suggested by Jim was, if we were pursued, to take refuge here and defend ourselves until Jim has time to get back to the school and bring a party along to our assistance. To a certain extent, the notion was a good one, but there are certain points from which it must be viewed; and, on the whole, I do not think it will do."

"What a thing it is to have a turn for mathematics!" said Terry. "Everything is reduced to a correct line of working by calculation."

"Keep your compliments," returned Morse, "until I have conveyed you safely home. It is my intention to do so without the loss of any one of us, and without a scratch. This we could not hope to do if we have to encounter a party of men that are really very formidable when arrayed against us."

"Dere's Charley, Massa Morse," interposed Romeo.

"Well, yes, we have Charley; but it would be unwise to believe that he would be a match for six or seven men armed with revolvers and knives. It would be poor satisfaction to me to know that we had killed them all, if in the struggle one here lost his life."

"Would you be dainty about killing any of the crew?" asked Felton.

"Something must be done in self-defence," said Morse, "and whatever it is will be of a nature not to disturb my conscience. We are not the aggressors, and the men we are dealing with are practically outlaws. To be tender in my treatment of them would be weakness."

"Dat sure," murmured Romeo. "An' you 'bout de strongest boy in de head I know ob."

Romeo meant it as a compliment, and Morse said he was much obliged to him. Terry's remark that the strongest head was presumably the thickest was accepted as a jest.

"As soon as it is dark," Morse continued, "we retreat by yonder gate, the third one from that by which we entered this most dolorous city. The tent and all the cooking utensils must be left behind to call for another day."

"Dey not much trouble to carry," Romeo said.

"We must leave them, as we must move immediately after night has come upon us. There will be no difficulty in seeing your way. Having arrived at the gate I have pointed out to you, you will there wait for me."

"Are you going to stay behind?" exclaimed Ganthony.

"Just long enough to receive our friends, who, I perceive, are already preparing to descend upon us. Two of the men have left the wood"—Morse sat with his back to it, consulting his "magic mirror"—"and are creeping down from rock to rock. They will all be on the move soon, and, naturally, they will make for the gate by which we entered. It is there I intend to receive them."

"But why run the risk?" asked Terry—"the risk of falling into their clutches? Now that you have decided to leave the baggage behind, we can easily give them the slip."

"We cannot get far away," said Morse, "unless they receive a decided check. We cannot traverse the wood freely after dark, but must go along cautiously; and I doubt if we shall get very far ere we are obliged to halt till dawn. I am going to make sure our foes

do not follow us. There are two more men creeping out now, and one of them is the fellow who leads them—Giuseppo, Jim said they called him.”

He sat with his eyes fixed on the small mirror, with the look on his face that was always there when he was engaged in mental calculations. They kept silent until he spoke again.

“In ten minutes,” he said, suddenly, “it will be dark. In half an hour I must be ready to receive my guests.”

The small fire which Romeo had lighted was now only a heap of smouldering ashes. The negro was desired to quietly scatter them. He did it with his bare feet; and then, as the shades of night swept rapidly across the landscape, Morse bade them prepare to move.

“They cannot see so far in the gloom,” he said. “Get along, walk quietly, and do not so much as utter a single word.”

They were little more than moving shadows as they crept along the street to a flight of steps further on, by which they could descend in the direction of the gate chosen for exit. Morse remained squatting on his haunches, thoughtfully working out a problem, or something akin to one, in his mind.

“Twenty grains,” he muttered, “will lift a ton. Weight of gates and buttresses seven tons, or thereabouts.”

From his inner coat-pocket he brought out a small wooden box, about three inches by two, and raised the lid carefully. Inside were a number of small packages about the size of teething-powders.

“If I had told the boys what I have been carrying with me,” he said, grimly, “I am afraid they would have been very uncomfortable.”

He rose up and slipped down the steps without a sound. At the bottom he stopped to pick out one of the packages from the box, and restored the latter to his pocket.

Stealthily as an Indian in a hostile country, he pursued his way to the gates.

It will be remembered that the two bronze gates opened with an ease that rather astonished the boys when first they saw them move. This was, as explained at the time, partly to be accounted for by a metal ball under each lower hinge, containing oil.

This metal ball revolved on a plate of bronze, and anything placed close to it must necessarily be subject to friction.

Morse first of all closed the gates, and then with great care placed the powder close under the metal ball. He gently pushed it well in with the thin blade of a small pocket-knife.

His preparations were, so far, complete.

But he had as yet to see how the thing would act, and to what extent it would work towards the end he aimed at.

Here was his latest invention—a small portion of a compound which he believed was far and away the most violent explosive known to man.

Withdrawing aside, to the distance of fifty yards in the direction of the gates where he was to rejoin his friends, he lay down at full length upon the ground, and waited the result.

It was but a quarter of an hour later when a figure loomed up dimly in the gloom, and he recognised it as the foremost of his Spanish foes.

The man stood still by the gates, and was in a little while joined by another, and then another, and so on, until Giuseppo himself appeared.

It was plain that they had not anticipated the gates being closed, but it was equally evident that none saw anything pointing towards danger. The only doubt in the minds of the subordinates was whether they had arrived at the right spot or not.

Giuseppo, whose actions Morse was able to distinguish pretty clearly, had no doubt about the matter.

Though no word was spoken, he made his belief clear by his movements, and he finally directed one of his followers to push open the gates, and to do it heedfully.

The man put his shoulder to the nearest gate, and it turned slowly for an inch or two. Finding it made no noise, he gave it a sharp thrust, and then it seemed as if the very earth at his feet had been rent in twain.

Morse, from his post, watching with all the coolness of an old philosopher, beheld the gates tossed into the air, and a huge mass of masonry on either side came toppling down.

To him it seemed as if Giuseppo and his men had been suddenly buried alive.

It was what he had intended to do, but the complete success of his experiment sent a shudder through him.

He waited just long enough to hear any cry or groan that might have followed the explosion, but after the rattle of falling masonry all was still.

“It is entirely successful,” he murmured, as he got upon his feet, and, half stunned with the emotions within him, staggered in the direction of the appointed spot to rejoin his friends.

He rejoiced as an inventor, but was deeply moved as a youth who had personally tested the power of a terrible discovery.

Then came the thought, natural under the circumstances:

“I—I, Robert Morse, as yet but a schoolboy, have the power to wreck towns, cities, *nations*, at my finger’s ends.”

Then he stopped, and put his hands before his face.

“May I never use it save in good cause!”

He shivered from head to foot, so deep were the feelings that possessed him, and it was fully ten minutes later when he joined his friends, who were anxiously awaiting him.

"We were getting afraid," said Ganthony, "that something had happened to you. What have you been doing?"

"I could not tell you now," answered Morse; "let us get away from here. Take your time. No enemy can disturb or trouble us in any way."

He turned from them, leading the way, and they followed him wonderingly.

Though startled by the explosion, they did not know its full import, nor did they guess that the bold boy carried on his person the material for a dozen similar wreckings, each to be as violent and as effectual as that he had just accomplished.

CHAPTER XLV.

MR. FARRELL MAKES SOMETHING OF HIMSELF.



I insist—I request—I—I order you to put this boat about, and head for Gibraltar!"

Mr. Farrell stood on the deck of the "Dart," his face livid with passion. Jim, at the helm, looked him coolly through and through.

"Mr. Farrell," he said, "in a few minutes we shall be within the shelter of the lagoon. We may be wanted there."

They were alone on the deck, master and pupil. Eveline and her mother were below, and Changeling was in the engine-room. The schoolmaster made a movement in the direction of Jim, who warned him to stand back with a motion of his hand.

"If you attempt to take the wheel from me," he said, "I must summon Changeling to the deck."

"And what will he dare to do?" demanded Mr. Farrell.

"As a last resource he may probably pitch you overboard."

"Have a care," said the schoolmaster, threateningly; "do you know what you are saying? Am I to be murdered in cold blood by one of my servants?"

"Mr. Farrell," said Jim—he was himself pale with excitement—"if your wishes are carried out, many people, those you have deliberately taken under your care, will, I verily believe, be sacrificed. At the risk of incurring your displeasure and enmity, I do not intend to permit it, if I can help it. Why are you so

desirous that the 'Dart' should go at once to Gibraltar?"

"I consider it essential to the safety of my wife and daughter," was the angry reply.

"Well, as soon as you and I are landed Changeling can take them on to Gibraltar. But there is danger in the air for those in the school, who cannot have the least inkling of it. Anon that smuggler-boat will be here with half a score well-armed, determined ruffians."

"Gordon," said Mr. Farrell, huskily, changing his tone to one of supplication, "I am not fit to cope with danger on shore. Recent events have entirely unnerved me. I dread going back, for I have a presentiment that there I shall find my doom."

"Well, put me ashore alone," said Jim, "and go your own way, sir. If you are afraid to face the foes that have risen against you, leave us to defend ourselves while you go to Gibraltar and arrange the means for removing the boys—many of whom are much too young to run any risk in fighting with men—to their homes."

"If I once set foot on shore," said Mr. Farrell, passing his sleeve across his forehead, "how can I go away?"

"That is for you to consider, sir," answered Jim, coldly. "Don't come any nearer, or I must call Changeling."

"I will go with you," said the schoolmaster, and the next moment he sprang upon Jim with the frenzy of a madman.

The boy was completely taken by surprise, and driven back from the wheel. The pair fell to the deck, locked in close embrace.

"You rebellious cub!" hissed the schoolmaster. "Will you lie still until I give you leave to rise?"

"No!" answered Jim, between his teeth; "if you want me to lie still you must throttle me!"

"And I'll do it!" said the half-maddened man, as he threw his whole weight upon him.

"Hallo! what's the shindy?" cried the voice of Changeling, as the owner of it appeared on deck.

As no answer was given him, and Mr. Farrell seemed bent on choking the life out of Jim, Changeling felt that he could not waste any more time by making inquiries. So he ran up, and, dragging the schoolmaster off the boy, threw him aside as if he had been a sack of shavings.

"What's the matter?" he cried. "Gone right off your head, Mr. Farrell?"

The sounds of a struggle and raised voices brought Eveline and Mrs. Farrell to the deck. As they came hurrying up the companion, Jim resumed his place at the wheel.

His dress was rumpled, and his cap had been knocked off, but otherwise he was as cool as ever.

"Nap, dear," cried Mrs. Farrell, "who has been making all this rioting?"

"We are within sight of the lagoon," said Jim, "and Mr. Farrell wishes me to turn back for Gibraltar."

"I seek the safety of my wife and child," said Mr. Farrell, as he rose to his feet, scowling at Changeling, who regarded him with supreme contempt and anger.

"My dear Nap," urged Mrs. Farrell, "where can we be so safe as at home?"

"There is no safety for us there," was the wild reply, "and he"—pointing at Jim—"knows it. He is in league with our enemies, and intends to betray us into their hands."

"That, in the face of my having recently rescued you from them," rejoined Jim, "is a cool assertion, to say the least."

"Father," said Eveline, with tears in her eyes, but withal speaking firmly, "you ought to know better than speak in that way of one who has done so much for us."

"Ah!" exclaimed the schoolmaster, "you against me, too? How true it is that a man's foes are of his own household! Do as you will. Connive against me. I wash my hands of all of you."

"Nap!" cried Mrs. Farrell.

"And you, too!" he almost yelled. "My life is worth little with such people as you about me. Stay on deck. Don't follow me below!"

There was something almost childish in the way he flounced from the deck and vanished from sight.

Eveline sat down, very pale and quiet. Mrs. Farrell wrung her hands and moaned.

"It is such a pity to excite him," she said, "for it makes him bad for days."

"Don't you give way, mum," said Changeling, consolingly, "he'll get over it. Mr. Farrell is one of them people as howls out all his venom. There ain't much haction in him."

"Changeling," said Jim, gently, "go to your engine. I shall want you to slow down in a few minutes."

"Certainly," answered Changeling, "you are right. I'd better not have put my spoke in, not being gifted with the art of 'ding anything properly, 'cept a hengine. I takes the hint kindly."

Rob vanished below, and Jim, with closed lips, continued steering towards the lagoon, now within half a mile of the launch. Mrs. Farrell wrung her hands and moaned. Eveline was silent.

Thus they remained until the little steamer had entered the lagoon, and Jim had signalled for Changeling to go at half-speed. Their coming had been perceived from the shore, and quite a host of men and boys were running down to welcome, as they supposed, the schoolmaster from his trip.

But the amazement of all when they saw Jim on

board was very great, and Mr. Groby, who was with the foremost, frowned and flushed.

The anchor was dropped, and Mr. Farrell returned to the deck looking very stiff about the back.

"You are all at liberty to go ashore," he said; "personally, I shall remain on board for the present."

"My dear Nap—" began Mrs. Farrell, but he checked her with an angry motion of the hand.

"I decline to explain my reasons," he said; "you will please to go ashore."

There was nothing more to be said. Jim pulled the little boat round, and Changeling having come on deck, he was requested by the schoolmaster to leave with the rest.

"You will please send Chorker to me," he said.

Now it had been openly said that Jim had gone to the wood; certainly he did not leave until long after the launch had put to sea. How he got on board was a tremendous problem to the boys, but they merely raised their caps to the ladies, who, with Jim, went on to the house.

Mr. Groby after some hesitation followed them.

At the door Jim stopped with the ladies, who expressed their regret that Mr. Farrell should have been so disagreeable to one who had saved his life.

"I beg," said Jim, "that you do not mention it. Mr. Farrell will get over his temporary anger. He has been upset—unnerved, I may say—by his recent adventures."

"It is like you to speak in that way," replied Eveline, gratefully.

Mr. Groby came up quickly, and raised his hat.

"I trust you have had a pleasant voyage," he said, "though shorter than Mr. Farrell originally intended."

"We have had a dreadful time," answered Mrs. Farrell, "and if it had not been for Gordon we should now all be dead. He bravely came to our rescue under the most extraordinary circumstances."

She shook hands with him again, Eveline bestowing a kindly smile upon him, and they disappeared.

Mr. Groby looked moodily at Jim, who surveyed him wonderingly, not understanding the troubled look of the under-master.

"Has anything happened since I went away, sir?" he asked.

"You had no business to go away," replied Mr. Groby, angrily. "I have not the least doubt it was a planned thing between you."

"Between whom?" asked Jim.

"Never mind; I will not go into that. They picked you up from the shore, I presume. You shammed going away with the rest."

"No, sir," quietly returned Jim, "I went with them without the least idea of falling in with the launch. We have had some wonderful adventures, which I would rather not take up your time in telling now."

"I do not desire to listen to them," said Mr. Groby, angrily waving his hand. "You have been guilty of a great breach of discipline in going away without leave, and I must report it to Mr. Farrell when he comes ashore."

"I did not think you would object, sir," said Jim; "in fact, I thought you tacitly approved of our going."

"Where are the others?"

"On the other side of the island, perhaps. I left them there."

"To enjoy the society on board the launch, of course? I wonder at Mrs. Farrell's encouraging you."

Jim turned away. He did not understand the mood of the under-master, and sought more congenial society in Hillyard, Whiffer, and others, who were lingering hard by with the hope of getting a few words with Jim on account of his unexpected return with the launch.

At the same moment Chorker, who had been routed out of the kitchen by Changeling, hurried by, and taking the boat, pulled away to the launch.

Mr. Farrell received him on deck with almost geniality, and they both disappeared below. Ten minutes later Chorker was again in the boat with a letter, which he, when near enough, tossed on the shore.

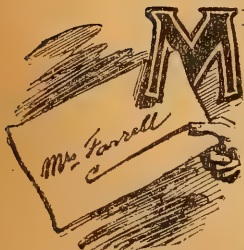
"One of you boys take that to Mrs. Farrell," he said, "but there ain't no hurry for a few minutes."

Having seen Lal Brodie pick up the letter, Chorker returned to the launch, and almost immediately afterwards Mr. Farrell was seen at the helm.

Chorker raised the anchor, dived below, set the engine going again, and almost as quickly as the facts have been penned, the "Dart" was once more on her way, heading for the sea.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A COWARDLY DESERTION.



MEANWHILE Jim, with several of his chums, had walked away, seeking a retired place for a talk. Jim had much to tell of importance to all, but he did not wish, for the present, to take the entire school into his confidence.

They settled in a corner in the rear of the school-house, and, unconscious of the departure of the launch, Jim Gordon gave a brief sketch of his adventures to his amazed companions.

In conclusion, he said:

"Now I must first make Mr. Groby aware of possible peril from the crew of the boat sent on a wild-geese chase to meet Espardo Reonardo, for they will surely land, and finding nobody here, may be led to do mischief, and then I must organise a rescue party to go to the aid of Morse. Possibly he may not want us, but it is as well to make sure. Anyway, I arranged to return to the old city so strangely buried in the heart of the island."

"I have one thing to say, Jim, that may surprise you," said Dawson. "The other day, in passing through the chine with some of our fellows, we distinctly heard voices of men coming from the direction of the big cave that was brought to light by Morse. We did not go up to see who it was, because we had no means of defending ourselves if attacked, but came along home and told Mr. Groby of it."

"And what did he say?" asked Jim.

"He said it was probably Chorker and some of the other men; but that could not be, for Chorker was away up the other side, in the vineyard with Rainstone. We mentioned this to Groby, but he very curtly told us not to bother about so small a matter. There was nobody on the island who would hurt us."

"I can't make out Groby. He seems to have quite changed to another man since I went away a few days ago."

Jim rose up, and having asked those he had confided in not to say anything about his adventures to the others, for awhile, at least, he went in search of Mr. Groby, with whom he had resolved to have a few words that would clear the air.

On getting to the front he immediately missed the launch, and asked Stiff, who came running up to him, what had become of it.

"It went to sea half an hour ago," replied Stiff, "and Lal had a letter to take to Mrs. Farrell. Shortly after she sent for Mr. Groby, and they've been confabbing ever since."

"Where is Lal?" asked Jim.

"He was here a minute ago," said Stiff, looking round. "Oh, I remember! He is in the post-office, writing a letter. It has been open since you went away, and we use it for all sorts of things, just as we use the class-rooms. Mr. Groby said it was a better place, and handier. There would not be so much running in and out the house."

Jim hastened to the post-office. The door was open, and Lal Brodie sprawling on the counter, with paper, pen, and ink.

"You took a letter to Mrs. Farrell?"

"I did, Jim. It was from Farrell. He's gone off to Gibraltar with Old Chorker."

"To Gibraltar?" exclaimed Jim.

"That much Mrs. Farrell let out before she asked me to fetch you or Groby. Not being able to find you, I sent Groby along, and he's been with her ever since."

"It is a cowardly desertion!" cried Jim, hotly.

"A what?" asked Lal Brodie, surprised.

"A cowardly desertion!" repeated Jim. "Look here, Lal. That man knows there is danger lurking round us. We haven't quite got rid of our enemies. More have cropped up, and Farrell knows it. Instead of facing the position like a man, the duffer has cut and run to save his own skin."

"And they christened him Napoleon!" murmured Lal, drily. "But, I say, Jim, what sort of fellows have we to fear?"

"You shall know soon. I must go at once and see Mrs. Farrell, even at the risk of colliding with Groby. I used to think he was a friend and good fellow, but, on my word, I begin to doubt him."

"You think he is another Nap?"

"No; I have other notions concerning him. But I can't stay to talk now."

Jim walked away, and entering the house, met Macbeth, who was coming out.

"You de very pusson I comin' for, Massa Gordon," he said. "Miss Eveline in Number One Class-room, an' she wish to see you 'tick'ler. 'Fore you go, sar, gib us a word ob comfort about dat boy, Romeo, ob ours. He lef' us wifout a partin' word, an' me an' him fader been broken-hearted."

"Romeo was all right when I left him," replied Jim.

"I expect you will see him back in a day or two."

"He berrer come soon, Massa Gordon, for dem sperrits hab been roamin 'bout' de house ebery night since he lef' us. Me and Hamlet hear 'em going up and down de stairs, but I 'spect dey forgot which room was ours, for dey not come in. Still it keeps us awake wif rappyrenshuns ob dere payin' us a visit."

"Romeo will quiet them when he returns," said Jim.

He was in a hurry to get to Number One Classroom, for he knew that Eveline would not lightly send for him. He found her in tears.

Moved to the depths of his young heart, he asked her what had so distressed her. It was simply a matter-of-fact question, for he already guessed the origin of her tears.

"To think that papa should so meanly desert us," she sobbed.

"He is hardly responsible for anything he does," replied Jim. "That terrible experience on board the 'Dart' on the other side of the island has completely demoralized him."

"It is kind of you to make excuses," said Eveline, "but I always knew he was not all he pretended to be. I am not crying on my own account now. It is for mamma. She is utterly overcome by the stupid letter papa has written."

"Is there a possibility of my seeing it?" inquired Jim.

"There it is," said Eveline, producing the letter from her pocket, and handing it to him. "I would not have troubled you with it even now, but there is something very strange in Mr. Groby. I do not think he is a real friend to us, and I detest him."

The emphasis she put upon the verb active left no room for doubt as to her sentiments. She had suddenly conceived a hatred for the under-master.

Jim asked her what caused her to change her opinion, but she refused to say more.

"Mr Turner is like a scared rabbit," she said, "and Mr. Storeby is not a man we can appeal to. Jim, I told mamma I had asked you to do what you could to help us all, and she acquiesced. But she is almost prostrated."

"Let me read the letter," said Jim, as he cast his eyes upon it.

Here is the precious epistle:

"DEAR WIFE AND DAUGHTER,—It is perfectly clear to me that we are in peril of being all killed outright by our enemies, and therefore I think it my duty to hasten to Gibraltar to lay the position before the governor there. I trust I may be in time, but should I not you will understand that it will be better for one of us to be saved than all lost. Could I have assisted you in any way by remaining I would have done so, but it would have been worse than useless for me to stop on the island.

"I may say also that your conduct in supporting that rebellious boy Gordon has in a great measure alienated my affection from you, but as a matter of duty I will do what I can to prevent the catastrophe that threatens all.

"NAPOLEON FARRELL."

"Eveline," said Jack, "I cannot trust myself in your presence to comment on this letter. All I will say is that what I can do, and others with stout hearts can aid me to do, shall be done."

She gave him her hand and he raised it respectfully to his lips.

Then, with a heart full of bitter thoughts and stern resolve, he left the room.

CHAPTER XLVII.

TWO STRANGE BIRDS AT SEA.



FARRELL, when he chose Chorker for his companion, fully believed that he had selected one who could well and ably steer the launch to Gibraltar.

Knowing nothing whatever of navigation, he had from the first received the assurances of his subordinate, that he was a past-master of it, in perfect faith. Chorker, while dimly conscious of being ignorant

in some matters, had an unswerving faith in his ability to command anything afloat.

If requested, he would have undertaken the charge of a Cunard liner.

All went well with them on the outset of the voyage. The engines worked smoothly, and Mr. Farrell managed to keep the bow of the launch pointing in the direction he knew, from repute, the great Rock of Gibraltar lay.

So they went on straight enough until the island lay behind them, a mere cloud in the horizon.

Then the shades of evening were drawing nigh, and Mr. Farrell began to feel that the inward man had need of attention.

By a chord of sympathy Chorker was also reminded of the ordinary want, and he thrust his head out of the engine-room companion, and said:

"She's a-goin' easy, cap'. Might I be so bold as to ax for a cup of tea?"

"Chorker," said Mr. Farrell, "you will find everything requisite in the main-cabin. I shall also be glad of something to eat and drink."

Chorker was fairly handy as a cook, and tea was soon prepared. By that time it was almost dark.

Acting on the advice of Chorker, the helm was lashed so as to keep the launch going on straight ahead and they partook of the meal together.

"In the night-time," said Mr. Farrell, looking uneasily up at the darkening sky, "what are the means of guiding a vessel?"

"There's the compass," replied Chorker, "which I'm free to confess can't be relied on aboard here"—as a matter of fact, he could not have boxed the compass to save his life—"but your true sailor, when he can, goes by the stars."

"I confess to an ignorance of astronomy," said Mr. Farrell. "Mr. Groby instructs in that branch of our educational code."

"Then you don't know one from t'other?" said Chorker, cunningly.

"I must confess I do not," was the rejoinder.

"You leave the stars to me," said Chorker, quite relieved. "I'll direct you. Although, mind you, I think the best thing to do is to lie to until the day comes agen."

"I would rather get as far away as possible," said Mr. Farrell; "we are much too near the island to be safe."

"As you please," said Chorker, rising. "Now I'll jest see to the priming of the engine-lamps, for they seem to be a-lowering, and the engine is a-slowng down."

"Shall I unlash the helm?"

Wait a bit till I give the word."

Chorker went forward and disappeared. In a few minutes his head popped up.

"Where does that 'ere warnint Changeling keep the ile?" he asked.

"In a large carboy in the engine-room," replied Mr. Farrell.

"The blamed thing is empty."

A cry of despair burst from the lips of the schoolmaster. Chorker did not seem to realise exactly what was the matter.

"There's ile elsewhere, ain't there?" he said.

"Not a drop," wailed the schoolmaster. "Our lamp expired in the cabin early this morning."

"Then we had better turn back," suggested Chorker.

"How?" howled Mr. Farrell.

"I don't know, unless we take to the boat."

"What! and leave the launch adrift? You are an idiot!"

"With all due defrence, sir," replied Chorker haughtily, "I think there is a pair of us."

"Anything is better than drifting here," said Mr. Farrell, after a pause. "Do you think you could pull as far as the island?"

"I could do my bit," answered Chorker, "but I should expect you to do your share."

Chorker was huffed. He also felt he was, in a measure, master of the situation; therefore he was by nature bound to be impertinent.

"I dare not risk my life in so small a boat as is attached to this launch," said Mr. Farrell, after a pause.

"I could," said Chorker, snorting, "but I am not going to do it."

He stepped up to the side of the launch and peered over. An exclamation burst from his lips.

"The boat's gone!" he said, or rather roared out. "I thought I saw you a-tying of it up?"

"I did it to the best of my ability," replied Mr. Farrell, angrily.

"Your ability ain't up to much," said Chorker. "I suppose you gave it just one turn?"

"I thought that would suffice. The rope seemed to hold."

"This comes of j'ining in a voyage with an idiot."

"Chorker!"

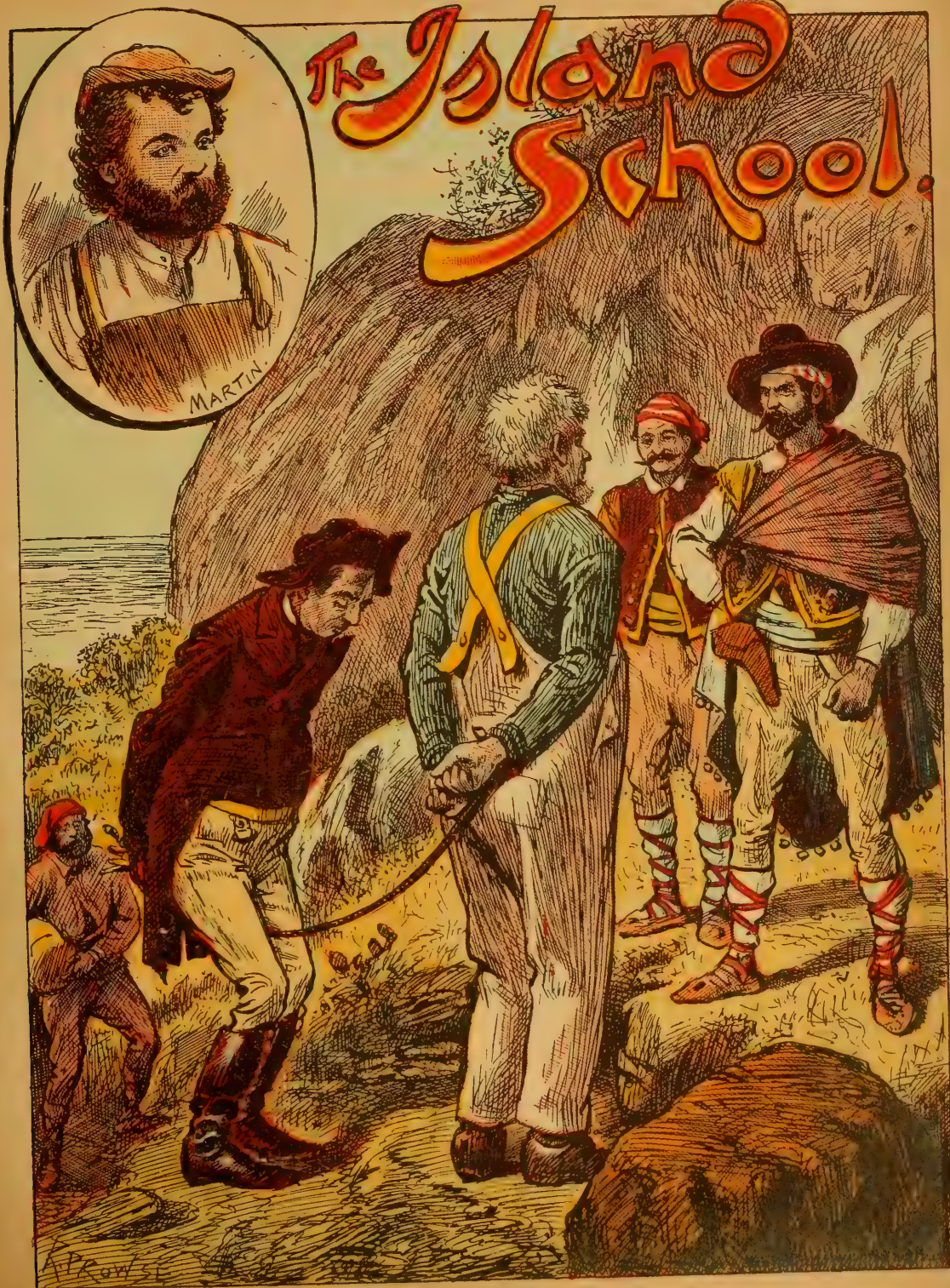
"You may Chorker or Walker or Corker as much as you please. Here we are, 'elpless on the hocean, and onless the wind changes we shall drift across to the Hafrican coast, where we stand an unkimmon good chance of being sold into slavery."

And then he wound up with some expletives on the head of the dismayed schoolmaster.

There was no doubt about the nature of the position they were in—practically helpless on the sea, without even the means of lighting up to warn any approaching vessel of their neighbourhood.

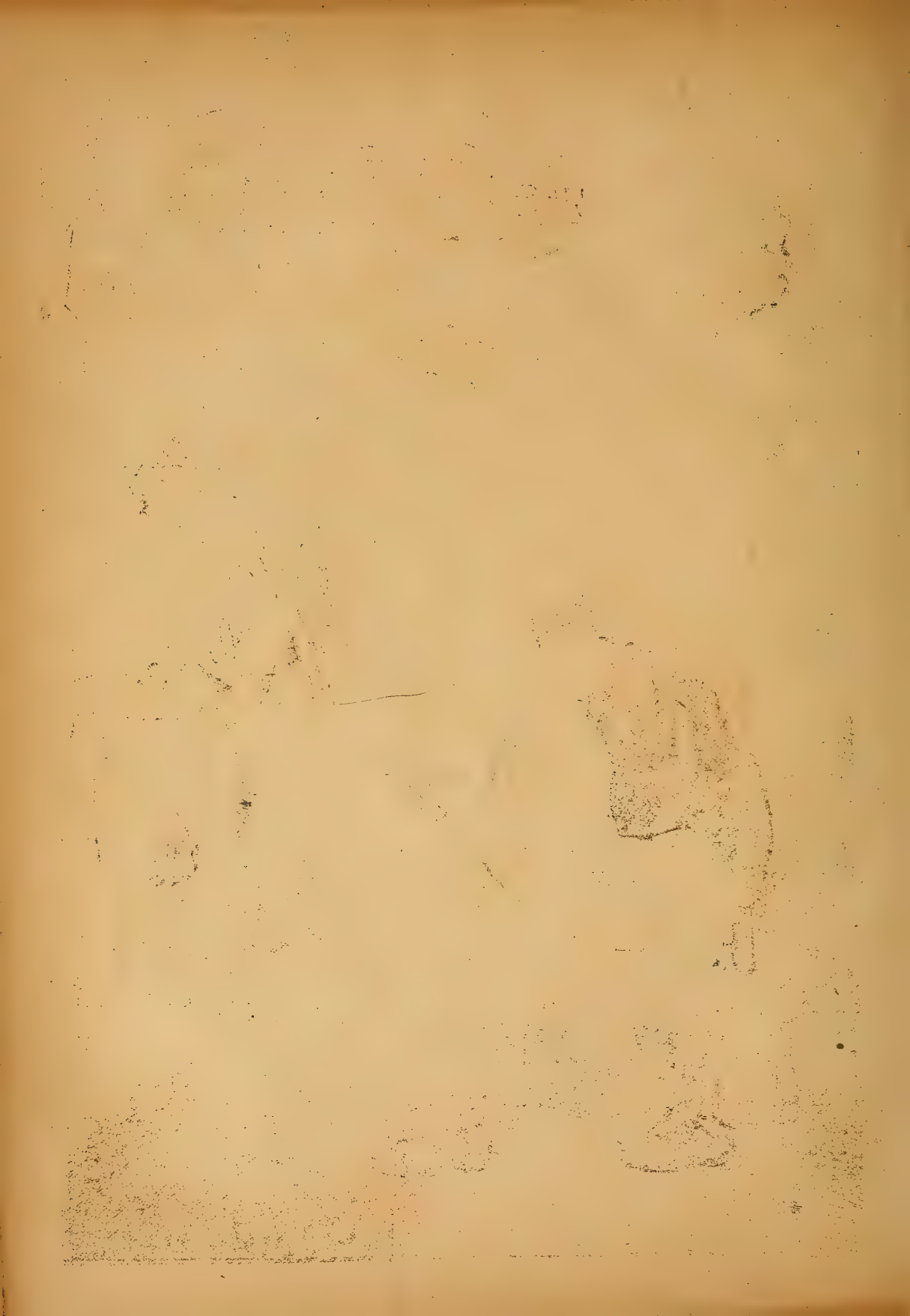
AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



"How fares it with you, Senor Farrell?" The Schoolmaster shivered.
he answered, wretchedly.

"I am not well,"



Mr. Farrell groaning over this, Chorker ventured to suggest that the chances were ten thousand to one against a collision.

"By the law of chances, perhaps," said the schoolmaster; "but it too often happens that when it is considered an accident is most unlikely to occur, it comes about."

The darkness deepened, and night spread its brooding wings over the sea. A gentle breeze blew from off the island, and the "Dart," slowly impelled by it, drifted on.

Mr. Farrell, seated aft, brooded over his lot, reviling his folly in not having seen that the launch was in a condition for the trip ere he put to sea.

By-and-by he fell asleep.

Chorker meanwhile sought comfort from a pipe and a glass of beer, a bottle of which he had discovered below.

The old man was not endowed with too much courage, but he had more real heart in him than the schoolmaster, who had none at all to speak of.

He was also less sensitive and a slower thinker, and was, therefore, not so apprehensive of possible danger.

Still he was well aware that he and the schoolmaster were in a fix, the outcome of which was not particularly clear.

After his pipe and beer, he too fell asleep, and for hours the launch slowly drifted on with the two unconscious companions in misfortune on board.

Suddenly Mr. Farrell was awakened by a scream that sounded like a shriek of mortal agony in his ears, Springing up, he saw, hard by, the high bows of a big ocean steamer.

Apparently it was making straight for the launch, and its being run down was, in his eyes, inevitable.

It was still night, but at the last moment the watch on board must have detected the perilous position of the launch, for the bow was alive with men shouting and violently gesticulating.

There was also heard the voice of one in command giving orders in an effort to avoid a collision.

Chorker also awoke, and for an instant the two terrified men saw death. Then the big ship slowly swerved to the left and shot by, some of her outside gear knocking down the funnel of the "Dart," and then the launch was left spinning in a sea that was eddying and churning like a small whirlpool.

"Whew!" gasped Chorker, "that was as close a shave as I ever knowed."

"Why did you not keep a lookout?" demanded Mr. Farrell.

"Keep it yourself," grunted Chorker; "and suppose I had a-done it, what then? We are as helpless as a log on the sea. We can't steer clear of anything. We've got to take our chance."

Mr. Farrell, with a groan, resumed his seat, and there was a long silence. But neither slept again. Then slowly came dawn, and the eyes of Chorker, roaming over the sea, beheld a boat of the larger fishing-class bearing down upon him.

It was a stranger to him. Not so to Mr. Farrell, who in his turn perceiving it, sprang up with a scream of alarm.

"The Spanish brigands!" he shouted. "We are both dead men!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MR. GROBY SHOWS HIS TEETH.



CONSTERNATION that was almost general prevailed in the school when it was known that Mr. Farrell had practically deserted the island, and left its little colony of teachers and boys to their fate.

The indignation of Martin and the other trade instructors was very great, and among the boys there was a feeling of contempt for their pusillanimous head.

Mr. Turner, the under-master, always pale and fluffy, became more pale and fluffy than ever. On Mr. Storeby the intelligence had a very remarkable effect.

He was about sitting down to dinner, when he heard the intelligence for the first time.

"What!" he exclaimed, "gone away—left us?"

"It is so," said Mr. Groby, who had given him the information, "and I am empowered by Mrs. Farrell to meanwhile act as head of this establishment."

"Why you more than anyone else?" demanded Storeby.

"There is no occasion to discuss the matter," said Mr. Groby, coolly. "I simply record the fact, and you will be wise to accept it in a becoming spirit."

"If," said Storeby, "I were not a man of peace, I—"

He turned from the table and walked quickly out of the room, straight from the house and into the post-office, where he closed the door and was alone.

"Groby boss," was all he said, and then he grasped the counter with both hands to still the terrible passion that was rising within him.

He mastered it after a struggle, and it left him, not pale or white, but *yellow*. On his return to the dining-room he looked like a man suffering from jaundice.

But he ate his food, and made no further reference to the departure of the schoolmaster.

Meanwhile Jim had been thinking of going to the assistance of Morse, but that intention received a sudden check.

It was in the evening, and he was talking the matter over with Steene, Whiffer, Dawson, and others, as they strolled up and down in front of the house.

To his other troublous thoughts Jim had now to contend with a misapprehension that arose from the alteration in the demeanour of Mr. Groby.

At present it was inexplicable to him.

The appearance of the changed man cut short the discussion going on by the boys. He came straight towards them and curtly asked Jim to walk a short distance with him.

"You boys need not linger here," he said to the rest.

They strolled off, muttering among themselves that "Jim was in for a wiggling for something;" and Jim himself, with a similar conviction in his breast, accompanied Mr. Groby along the beach.

"Gordon," said the latter, suddenly, "you take too much upon yourself."

"I am very sorry, sir," answered Jim, "but I had no intention of doing so."

"Intention is difficult to prove, in some cases," was the rejoinder; "anyway, you have been too officious, assuming that you are a sort of protector to Miss Farrell, and disparaging others who are more fitted to act as a protector to her."

Jim started, and looked up at the set face of the man of thirty-odd, who had suddenly and weakly given a clue to the mainspring of the change within him.

He did not return the boy's gaze, but walked on, staring straight ahead.

"By George!" thought Jim, "he is *in love* with Eveline."

"It is extremely improbable," continued Mr. Groby, after a long silence, "that Mr. Farrell will ever return here. I learn from his wife he is a man of means, and I know from my own observation that he is thoroughly selfish, and a coward. He will, in all likelihood, give us up for lost, and live away in some quiet place, making the best he can of the loss of his wife and daughter. That is also Mrs. Farrell's view, and as I do not entertain his fears, I shall endeavour to carry on the school."

Jim made no reply. He was too much astounded to say a word. It was clear to him that Mr. Groby, for his own ends, had succeeded in gaining a great amount of influence over Mrs. Farrell; but it was equally clear that he had failed to do so with Eveline.

Resuming his address to Jim, the newly-appointed head of the school said:

"I guess it is your intention, Gordon, to go in search of your friend Morse?"

"I was thinking of it," murmured Jim.

"Another instance of the extraordinary way you have of doing things without consulting your superiors."

"I did not think it was necessary until I had made my arrangements, sir."

"You know you did not intend to consult me at all."

Jim was silent.

"You have been guilty of so many outrageous breaches of discipline," continued Mr. Groby, "that I feel it imperative to show my displeasure by punishing you. For a week you will be confined in the building we call the post-office. I have that confidence in you which enables me to take your word that you will not leave without permission. You will be allowed an hour's exercise in the morning, and the same in the evening. Bedding and other necessities will be placed there for you at once."

"I should like to point out to you, sir, that it is absolutely necessary, in my opinion, that somebody should go to the help of Morse," said Jim.

"Morse can take care of himself," was the cool reply.

"Well, he may come home all right, sir," said Jim. "If he does not, the consequences rest upon your head."

"You are impertinent. Go to your place of confinement, instantly. But first give me your word that you will make no attempt to get away."

"And if I refuse, sir?"

"Measures will be taken to ensure your safe-keeping."

"I will give it for twenty-four hours," said Jim, and raising his cap, he walked off to his place of confinement.

Jim was in a boiling rage, and he would only accept the position at present, for he could not tell how far he might rely upon assistance if he rebelled against the authority of the new head of the school. He had the countenance of Mrs. Farrell, and, in addition, he was a man who had a certain commanding power that would influence those around him. It was not to be expected that all would look at matters in the light Jim did, or, if it were so, that they would be prepared to act as he desired them to do.

It was a difficult, complex position, and the boy met it very well, compromising matters by giving his parole for twenty-four hours.

The tidings of Mr. Groby being appointed to take the school in hand did not surprise many, for he, above all the masters, seemed most fitted for the post. But when it was known that Jim was put into confinement, loud and deep were the expressions of disgust and anger.

But Morse was away, and there was none other among

the boys who knew how to act under the circumstances. Nor was there one of the men who could move in the matter, unless it was Martin, and what could he do, alone?

Macbeth visited the prisoner just as it was getting dark. He brought supper, and a candle wherewith to light the barren place.

"Bring your bed 'reckly, Massa Gordon," he said; "but, loramassy! what t'ings coming to, dat we hab 'stablished a prison 'bout here?"

"It is all right, Mac," said Jim; "we shall come out of this trouble by-and-by."

"What is whispered 'bout consarnin Massa Morse?" asked Macbeth, lowering his voice. "Dey say dat he and de oder young genelman and our Romeo got chawed up by a lot of p'isonous smugglers on de oder side ob de island."

"Wait a bit before you make sure of that," said Jim, with assumed cheerfulness. His heart was, alas heavy enough at that moment.

"We do dat, sure," said Macbeth; "but my son Hamlet am a bit cut up 'bout his boy, and, pussinally, it's a serus ting for me to lose him, he habin' de gift ob circumwentling all de ghostesses."

Macbeth laid out Jim's supper on the counter, and it was soon done, for it consisted of nothing more than bread and cheese, and water.

"Massa Groby say dat no beer 'lowed to prisoners," explained Macbeth.

"Very good," dryly replied Jim; "I daresay we shall be able to even things for him, one day."

"May dat time come to-morrow!" said Macbeth, fervently. "'Pears to me dat durin' de larse few days dat pusson kinder got orf him feet and took to standin' on him head."

With a nod full of meaning, Macbeth left the post-office, and Jim fell upon his supper. The fare was humble, but he was hungry, and he partook of it with relish. Before he had finished, Macbeth and Hamlet came in together, the latter carrying a quantity of bed-linen, and the former bearing a light, iron bedstead.

They fitted them up in a corner of the sorting-room, and having asked Jim if they could do anything more for him, and received a negative reply, left him to repose.

Jim lost no time in getting into bed, and as thinking just then could no good to himself or others, he exercised the power he had of going to sleep with the least possible delay.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE RETURN OF MORSE.



IN the cold grey light of the early morning, Morse and those whom he had safely brought back from the City of the Dead descended the path leading from the castle to the school.

It was the morning following the confinement of Jim by the autocrat Groby, an event of which Morse had, of course, no cognisance.

The journey through the wood had not been performed without its anxieties and sufferings. In the first place they had run short of food, and had to eke it out with such edible berries and roots as they could find.

Charley, the bear, of course, flourished on such provender, but it was hardly suitable to his human companions, and they had become rather worn and thin.

Then again, for a whole day they had been without water, which, in the close, muggy atmosphere, was very trying. But whatever their difficulties and dangers and sufferings might be, they had come safely through all, and were within hail of the place they called "home."

"We have to consider," said Morse, as they neared the bottom of the path, "what is to be done with Charley. He can hardly be received in the house as a pupil."

"We must build a house for him," Terry suggested.

"And for an hour or two," said Ganthony, "we might stable the dear old boy in the post-office."

"A good idea," said Morse.

It was a well-known thing that, save when the letters were being sorted, the post-office was left unlocked, and none of them remembered, if they ever knew, that a portion of it, the outer office, was used as a store-room for vegetables and fruit.

Still less did they think that there was a prisoner on parole asleep in the sorting-room.

Morse opened the door, and on seeing the things packed up at one end, exclaimed:

"This won't do for Charley. He would gorge himself to death."

"Who's there?" cried a voice from the inner room.

"Jim, by Jingo!" exclaimed Terry.

Jim came to the door in his night-shirt, and stared a moment at the assembled company as if he could hardly believe his eyes.

"I hope it is you all right," he said, dubiously.

"Yes," replied Morse, as he went forward. "We are here, right as a trivet. But, in the name of all

that is wonderful, what are you doing with yourself?"

"Come inside," said Jim, "and I will get into bed again and tell you all about it. Romeo will see that Charley doesn't kill himself, but he may give him a decent meal."

"Dat me do sure," said Romeo, grinning, and Charley, who may have understood, snorted approvingly.

Jim hastened to bed again, for even in that clime the mornings are sometimes chilly. Morse and the boys followed him, and took their seats on the sorting-counter.

Jim first explained how it was he came to be incarcerated, without referring to his view of the reason for the change in the demeanour of Mr. Groby, and Morse afterwards related their adventures on the way home from the City of the Dead.

Much of it was of no import. All that is essential to the proper sequence of our story we have already penned.

"Well," said Jim, when all was told, "there is one thing I am pretty sure of as things are. Groby will never tolerate the presence of Charley here. He will in all probability order the poor beggar to be shot."

An exclamation of dismay burst from the lips of his hearers, and Morse muttered something under his breath about men who wanted lifting sky-high.

"But we had better circumvent him," continued Jim. "There is the castle. You could easily make Charley comfortable there. If we kept the secret of his being in existence—for the present, anyway—it may lead to his being eventually tolerated. Let us have in Romeo."

The negro was called in, and the position explained to him. The bare idea of Charley coming to an untimely end upset him dreadfully.

He said: "If dat 'ere Groby hurt a hair ob Charley's back, me do somefin to him dat he not get over for a week or two, if he get ober it at all."

"He might have the entire banqueting-hall to wander about in," said Jim, "and he could be visited frequently. Nobody without our knowledge is likely to go up there. The boys, as a body, have a dread of the old place, and the men never set foot in it except on public occasions. We shall always have notice of their going. It would certainly serve as a temporary hiding-place for the good old fellow."

So it was settled, and Romeo started off with Charley in a hurry, as the morning was getting on, and ere long the whole house would be stirring.

While he was gone there was a consultation between Jim and the rest, resulting in a certain line of conduct being decided on.

Romeo came back with the intelligence that Charley had taken very kindly to his quarters. Pro-

bably the baronial hall reminded him of his old home in the deserted city. That was Terry's suggestion, and voted a good one. After that they waited for the house to open, and by-and-by Romeo, who went to and fro, listening at the door, announced that he had heard his father and grandfather stirring.

"Now you see sumfin," he said. "By-em-by dey open de door and come out to bang de mats. Dat de moment when me take all de breaf out ob dere body."

"What are you going to do, Romeo?" asked Morse.

"Me goin' to lie down nigh de door as if me come home dere and died ob starvation."

The prospect of seeing Romeo sham a corpse, and the result of it upon the feelings of his relatives, was interesting matter, and with the door, half closed, the boys waited and watched for the thrilling scene.

Jim remained in bed, as he said he felt tired and worried a bit.

The watchers had not long to wait. Romeo had laid himself out to take away the breath of one or both of his relatives, and as far as his grandfather was affected, he succeeded to admiration.

The worthy old darkie, who had been having words with Hamlet as to the due proportion of the morning work to be performed by each, came bouncing out with a big mat in his hand, and not seeing Romeo lying at full length just outside, fell over him, and coming heavily to the ground, was literally deprived of every atom of breath in his body.

Romeo was startled by the complete success of his little game, although it took a different form from what he intended. He sat up and stared dismally at Macbeth as he lay curled up, gasping like a parish pump worked intermittently.

The old negro came round, and seeing Romeo near him, was further taken aback, and also sat up. Thus the pair remained, staring at each other for the better part of a minute.

The hidden spectators were in convulsions of silent laughter. Presently Macbeth found his powers of speech.

"Am dat you, Romeo, or your spectre?"

"It am me," replied Romeo.

"What you mean by tripping up you grandfader?" demanded Macbeth.

"You come shootin' out ob de house," said Romeo, "jess like an ole goat boun' on a butting exprodition. Dat how you come to knock me down, jess as me was a coming in to brace you like a fectionate grandson?"

"Dere not much more fection in you, Romeo," said Macbeth, "dan mose people carry on de tip ob you nose. But you welcome now you am back. Come in and brace you fectionate fader."

Thereupon they disappeared, and shortly after Morse and his tired companions followed them.

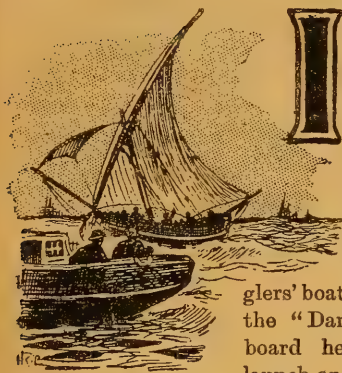
They went up to their dormitories, where they

found some of the boys awake, and the rest soon opened their eyes. The reception they met with was all that could be desired. But not a word was said about Charley, the bear.

Nor did Romeo breathe a syllable concerning the intelligent beast to his relatives. He knew that if the bear was to be spared to them, silence concerning his existence was absolutely necessary for the time.

CHAPTER L.

ONCE MORE CAPTIVE.



IT is necessary that we now for a short spell follow the fortunes of Mr. Farrell and Chorker. In the early morning of a most portentous day, they beheld the smugglers' boat bearing down upon the "Dart." The men on board her had espied the launch and recognised her.

Moreover, Vampa, who was in command of the boat, seeing the launch was rocking idly on the deep, was of opinion that all on board were safe in sleep, and he had a strong belief of her having got away under circumstances adverse to his welfare, and that of Giuseppe likewise.

He conceived it probable that the prisoners had released themselves and stolen away, passing him, as we have already recorded, and then continued the short voyage leisurely. Here was an opportunity of recovering the launch, and as his boat glided up, and the grappling irons like boat-hooks laid hold, he sprang upon the deck and secured the two palsied men.

Chorker was a stranger to him, but Vampa settled in his own mind that it was he who had come to the rescue and enabled the prisoners to escape.

"Ha—you !" cried Vampa, shaking his head at the terrified schoolmaster, "you think you give us a slip. But now you are here again. We have you. How am you wife and daughter ?"

"I don't know," replied Mr. Farrell, with a gasp.

"You not know ?"

"No."

"How should he ?" asked Chorker, "seeing as they're ashore. They was middlin' when we left 'em."

Vampa gazed from one to the other with beetling brows. The launch threatened to be a perpetual mystery to him.

"Explain, and be quick," he said, imperiously. "No lies !"

"We ain't given that way," muttered Chorker.

"I beseech you," said Napoleon Farrell, "to be merciful to me. I—I was rescued from you against my will. I left my wife and child ashore, and was on the way to——"

He stopped short, and Vampa surveyed him with a curious expression of face, a look of doubt and cunning mingled.

"Way to where ?" he asked.

Mr. Farrell turned a helpless face, miserably pleading in its expression, towards Chorker.

"We was out a-fishing," said that worthy.

"Ah, so," said Vampa, looking round him, "and you lose all your nets. I see. *You liars!* Hey, then, how is it that you break down our funnel? Is it for you to destroy the property of the great Giuseppe ?"

"His property?" Chorker ventured to say.

"Ay, his and our property, for we and Giuseppe are as one. We have it by right of capture. It is ours. You steal it again, and you destroy the funnel. So it is for us to do the rest. Throw them on board our boat."

"Steady there," cried Chorker. "Whoa, will you ? Easy does it."

This, and much more of the same sort, by way of expostulation, he bellowed forth as he was hustled to the side of the launch and pitched into the smugglers' boat.

Mr. Farrell, white as a coward going to execution, mutely allowed himself to be unceremoniously transferred from one vessel to the other.

They were told to lie down in the bottom of the boat, and did so, both in a quavering condition, but Chorker showing himself one degree less terrified than his master. But even he was in a very bad way indeed, until it struck him that he might possibly surmount many of the disagreeables of his position by becoming one of the band of the undoubtedly lawless men.

He had not the slightest objection to a lawless life for a change ; no twinges of conscience intervened. The only drawback to it as a calling was the possibility of his being found out and punished.

Meanwhile he had to bide his time, and silently watch the work of plundering the launch that was going on.

Everything of moderate weight and of the least value in her was transferred to the boat. Articles of a worthless nature, in a marketable sense, were thrown into the sea.

It was a labour of two hours or more, but it was accomplished at last, and the launch was soon left with nothing but her engines, and the heaviest furniture and fittings in the cabin, on board.

The men returned to the smugglers' boat, leaving Vampa on board. He was below, but did not remain long. Presently he came hurriedly up and leapt into his own vessel.

"Cast her off!" he cried. "Hoist all sail—bear away to the north-east. Quick, you sons of dogs!"

The boat bore away, and stirring Mr. Farrell with his foot, Vampa bade the schoolmaster "sit up."

"It is good for you to see the last of her," he said. "It will be something to remember by-and-by—if you live. I made a hole in her, and she is going down. Look up, both of you!"

They obeyed him, and the smugglers' boat having been brought up in the eye of the wind, they all watched the fate of the scuttled launch.

Vampa had drilled the hole, perhaps more than one, in the after part of her hull, and she was filling fast.

As the water poured in her bows rose in the air, until she was almost upright. In this position her proportions seemed to be doubled, and there was something very impressive in the thought that she was about to dive down to the bottom of the deep sea and never more be looked upon by man.

It had a thrilling effect upon the schoolmaster, who felt almost as bad as if he were about to sink himself and never be heard of again. Chorker looked upon it from a pecuniary point of view, and groaned as he thought of so much money being irretrievably lost.

At length the doomed "Dart," the pretty little launch of which the boys had been so proud, was as nearly upright as she could be in the air, and there she remained for a moment as if hesitating to take the plunge. Then with a remarkable swiftness and silence she shot down, and the waters closed over her.

There was an eddying and a little foam to be seen for a minute, and all was over. The "Dart" was gone down to the bottom of the sea, there to lie until the deep waters give up their secrets and their hidden treasures.

Mr. Farrell lay down again, and covered his face with his hands. Hopeless as he had felt before, he discovered that there was yet a deeper depth of despair. He could neither groan, nor moan, nor cry aloud. The utter misery of feeling that all was lost, was upon him.

"We will now head for the island," said Vampa; "and I say, you two, listen to me."

It was the schoolmaster whom he again stirred with his foot, and as before he raised his head, and turned a woebegone look upon the smuggler.

"We go to the island," said Vampa, "and we take you and that old dog there as prisoners."

"To what island?" asked Mr. Farrell.

"Why, to yours. To Fermentera—to Silver Bay,

where I expect to meet my good comrade, Espardo Reonardo—he who is to make a bride of your charming daughter."

The schoolmaster did not reply. There was something which seemed, to his coward nature, in his being taken back even worse than death itself.

He had left the island to return no more, deserting all in seeking his personal safety, and never dreaming that he would set eyes on them again; and now he was going back—and under what circumstances? The most humiliating. The launch at the bottom of the sea, he a prisoner, and bound to remain a captive, or face those whom he had deserted.

In either case there was nothing less than misery and shame for him. How could he endure it?

"The island," he groaned, "has from the first been my curse. It will now be my grave."

Nor was there much more comfort in store for Chorker, who had been the willing tool of a most despicable proceeding. The one ray of light lay in his prospective joining the smugglers.

"Being an Englishman," he thought, "they will be proud and pleased. I'll jine 'em."

CHAPTER LI.

THE RULING OF GROBY.



RS. FARRELL had but just sat down to breakfast with Eveline, when Mr. Groby appeared. He entered the room without ceremony, as one having a right to enter there.

Mrs. Farrell, startled, gave him a faint good-morning. Eveline took

no notice of him whatever. Casting a bitter glance at her, he addressed the mother.

"I am sorry," he said, "to disturb you in this way, but I should not like to take the step I meditate without consulting you."

"You have no right to do so!" Eveline remarked.

"My dear child!" remonstrated Mrs. Farrell.

"You are mistress here," said Eveline, "and Mr. Groby is, or ought to be still, a subordinate. He has done right in consulting you."

"I am afraid I have offended you, Miss Farrell?" said Mr. Groby, biting his under-lip.

"Mamma is waiting to hear what you have to say," said Eveline, and resumed her breakfast.

Mr. Groby went through the action of swallowing something disagreeable, and turning to Mrs. Farrell, resumed:

"The boys who absented themselves from school without leave have returned. Their names are Morse, Terry, Ganthony, and Felton. As I have already told you, they induced Romeo to go with them, but he being a simple-minded negro, I think we may pass over his misconduct. The boys must, however, be punished, if only to deter the rest from following their example."

"I hope you are not going to beat them?" said Mrs. Farrell, in a helpless manner.

"It is not my intention to do so," replied Mr. Groby. "I shall merely curtail their liberty, compel them to keep within certain bounds for a time. I trust you will approve of that?"

"Oh!" cheerfully exclaimed Mrs. Farrell, "there is nothing in that. What do you say, Eveline?"

"Nothing, mamma!" was the answer.

"Then I may assume," said Mr. Groby, "that I am at liberty to do as I please in this matter?"

He did not wait for any further assent, but left the room. Mrs. Farrell addressed Eveline in a somewhat acrid tone.

"I wish you would be more civil to Mr. Groby," she said.

"I do not like him," answered Eveline.

"Now that your papa has deserted us, we have nobody else to look up to."

"I think it would have been better if Mr. Groby had gone with papa."

Mrs. Farrell burst into tears.

"Was ever any woman troubled as I am?" she wailed. "What a husband and daughter I have! It is enough to break my heart!"

"I am sorry, mamma, that I vex you," said Eveline, "because I do not intend to do so. You have been very much upset, and your nerves are unstrung, or you would be able to see things as I do. If I do not like Mr. Groby, I cannot help it."

"He merely wishes to punish unruly boys."

"If the boys had not been what he calls unruly, we should now be in the hands of those horrible men. It was their leaving school without permission—although Jim—that is, Gordon—says that he had the tacit permission of Mr. Groby—which led to our rescue. I think that, if on no other account, mamma, we might have overlooked their breach of discipline."

But Mrs. Farrell, instead of answering in a direct way, merely continued to sob and wail and bemoan her lot, and Eveline, wearying of it, left her.

Meanwhile Mr. Groby summoned the delinquents into his presence, and informed them that "Mrs. Farrell" had decided upon restricting their outdoor movements for a week. They could go fifty yards to

the right of the house, and fifty yards to the left, but no further, and on no account were they to enter the temporary prison-house of Jim Gordon.

"And if you do not give your word to keep within bounds, you will be confined to the house," concluded Mr. Groby.

"I regret to say, sir," said Morse, "that I cannot give my word."

"Not give your word?"

"No, sir. Once outdoors, the temptation to go beyond the bounds specified would be irresistible."

"Then you will be confined to the class-rooms," said Mr. Groby, hotly. "What say the rest of you?"

They echoed the words of Morse, because, now that Jim was laid by the heels, for some hours, at least, Morse was their leader.

Obedying the mandate of Mr. Groby, they marched off to the class-room. He shortly followed them up and locked the door.

"That secures them," he muttered, "for the windows are barred."

The boys heard the click of the lock, and Terry turning to Morse, asked him what his reason was for refusing to accept a little liberty, which he thought was better than none.

"Because I should be obliged to keep within bounds which I do not intend to do now. Groby has some scheme in his head, and he wants to be free from our interference."

"You guess that much?" suggested Ganthony.

"I do. The man is completely changed. He is another Groby altogether. Now, let us see what chance we have of getting out here when we have a mind to."

The windows of the class-rooms looked out both back and front, and together they ran quite across the house. It was to the windows at the back that Morse turned his attention.

It will be remembered that some time before Mr. Farrell had set Martin to work preparing the iron bars for all the chief windows of the house, and in due time they were fixed. They were bars of the ordinary class, with flattened turned-in tops and bottoms, and perforated with a single hole apiece for a screw.

Morse had a pocket screw-driver attached to his knife, with which he set to work loosening the screws of one of the bars that covered the opening portion of a window. It was a tough job, and some of the wood under the bar had to be carefully scraped away ere he could loosen the screw.

But it was done at last, and the first being removed a little wriggling of the bar loosened the upper one, and the second screw was taken out without the least difficulty.

"It is all we need do for the present," said Morse.

"I will scrape the holes a bit so that we can take the screws out with our fingers and then replace the bar. Groby, I reckon, will visit us in the course of the day, and it will not do for him to suspect that we have a means of exit."

The bar was put back, and they had their whole time upon their hands. It was a puzzle to know what to do, but boys are very fertile in inventing games, and Ganthony, Terry, and Felton succeeded in amusing themselves for an hour, while Morse sat by the window thinking.

He was sorry he had not been able to communicate with Jim again ere he was confined, but hoped to be able to do so ere the day was out.

The morning passed slowly, but it came to an end at last, and shortly after twelve o'clock, Mr. Groby, with Romeo behind him bearing a tray, entered.

"Your dinner," he said. "It is the usual fare, brought to you by the desire of Miss Farrell. It was the intention of Mrs. Farrell to put you on prison rations for a day or so, but her daughter's pleadings, united to *mine*, led to your receiving food as usual."

Romeo stood behind him with a repressed grin upon his face. Nigger-like, he looked upon anything out of the usual line as something extremely comical.

Morse said, "We are obliged to Miss Farrell," purposely excluding Mr. Groby, because he did not believe they owed him anything.

"Put the tray down on that desk, Romeo," said Mr. Groby, curtly. "Boys, you have a quarter of an hour to eat your dinner in. Romeo will wait for the tray. And mind, you dog, that you see none of them escape, and lock the door on leaving. Bring the key to my private room."

"Your private room?" said Romeo, staring at him vacantly.

"It was Mr. Farrell's before he went away," was the brief reply, and the successor to the absent school-master left the room, drawing the door to with a jerk after him.

"It kine o' chokes me to hear ob him private room," said Romeo, "and it 'nuff to make a nigger sick to see de airs he gib himself. And don't you believ nuffin' 'bout missus puttin' you on de bread and water," he added. "She know nuffin' 'bout it. It was his deposal, but Miss Eveline, hearing ob it, come along on de rampage and, she say it not to be. De way she comb de hair ob dat Groby was a real treat."

"Combed his hair?" exclaimed Terry, innocently.

"Kettleforiacally, in a way," explained Romeo. "Not wif a comb, but jess make it stand out straight wif her tongue. He was in de hall by de door when she bounce right at him and say, 'Massa Groby, what you mean by starving de boys in redition to you oder inflamies?'"

"Were those her very words?" asked Felton, winking at Terry.

"Her bery words," replied Romeo. "Me take a metal note and obseruation ob dem. He look more like a fool dan my ole grandfather Macbef, when he was a-jawin' me, while he feel 'bout de kitchen fender for de poker and got hold ob de hot end ob it. 'Miss Eveline,' say dat Groby chap, 'I'm orfally sorry if you not approbe ob dis recceeding ob mine. I do it for missypline and de good ob de school. But if you wish, I quite willing——' At dis pint ob de consultation she cut him short—kinder snapped him nose and arf him head orf. 'Massa Groby,' she say, 'I resist on dem boys habin' de usual vittles. If you try to starbe dem again, perhaps you hear ob it from a corker you rase expect.'"

"She said quarter, of course?" quietly interposed Morse.

"Sumfin' in dat way," assented Romeo. "Owing to my habin' a reflective edification, some ob dem words reglar cokernuts for me to crack. Habin' rejuiced ebery hair ob him head to a state ob de broom bristles, she go away wif all de dignity ob a queen, leabing him more dan flabbygastered."

Approving comments on the matter of the story were uttered by the boys, and Terry especially complimented Romeo on his lucidity of utterance. Morse meanwhile was writing a few words on a slip of paper.

The narrative told and the writing done, the boys fell upon their dinner and speedily disposed of it. As Romeo was turning over the corners of the cloth upon the tray, Morse asked him to listen attentively for a moment.

"You know, Romeo," he said, "that ever since we crossed the island together that we look upon you as a friend—as one of us?"

"Sure, Massa Morse," responded Romeo, "me mortifiedly proud to hear dat. It warm de ole hearts ob my fader Hamlet, and Macbef."

"Well, as we look upon you as a friend," continued Morse, "we feel that we can trust you. Now, here is a short note I wish you to give to Gordon as soon as you can, but it must be done secretly. You understand?"

"You mean me to gib it to him when nobody dere?"

"You are to get into the post-office unobserved, and out again unseen, if you can. There may be a message to bring back, or a note. You will not deliver either to anybody but myself, will you?"

"Not for a cask ob gold sovrens," said Romeo. "Massa Morse, me being remoted up to de position ob a frien', I 'bout de most trusswordy man you find in de place. Put dat down in de note-book, Massa Morse."

Nodding his head in a sagacious manner, Romeo

retired with the tray, leaving the boys to make the best they could out of the coming long afternoon.

It was not until tea-time that Romeo brought the welcome intelligence to Morse that he had delivered his note safely to Jim, and he, having no pencil or paper, had simply sent a message back—"All right."

CHAPTER LII.

JIM'S PAROLE ENDED.



AMONG the boys generally there was a deal of surmise, some troublous thinking and talking; but on the whole, not so much uneasiness or fear as might be expected from so many, and some of them very young.

Steene, Rainstone, and Dawson, the only members of the Council of Ten who were at liberty, while feeling themselves that, in more ways than one, trouble was closing in around them, did their best to keep up the spirits of the rest.

But among the men it was a more difficult matter to set them at ease.

As they stood in a group, talking over the position, Dawson and Steene went by. Martin hailed them.

"Come here a minute," he said, and as they drew up he continued: "Without pretending to know everything you boys are up to, I know that if there is anything going, you young gentlemen would be in it. Can you tell us why Mr. Groby is down on Gordon, and a few others shut up in the class-room?"

"They went away without leave," replied Steene.

"There is more than that in it," said Martin. "Mr. Groby is giving himself airs, and I for one have already had enough of it. But that was not the point. Can you tell us who and what we are threatened with?"

"I cannot," answered Steene, and Dawson said the same.

"Never would I have set foot on the island," said Waffle, the bootmaker, "if I had had the least idea of what was to be the end of it."

"We shall be murdered," said Sleery, the carpenter.

"That's a dead-sure thing," assented Pastern, the painter and plumber.

"Don't be so fast, my lads," said Martin. "After all, there may not be so much in it. Nap Farrell never had, to my thinking, the heart of a mouse, and his

cutting it is not to be wondered at. The place is naturally getting into a mixture of sixes and sevens—one boy shut here, others shut up there, and more will follow, for when a Jack-in-office, as Mr. Groby is proving himself to be, starts on that sort of game, he seldom knows where to stop. In the end there will be a rebellion among the boys."

"No," said Steene, smiling, "we shall not come to that, whatever happens. I am sorry I cannot help you in what you want to know. You are as much in the secret of it all as we are."

As the boys had been expressly forbidden by Mr. Groby to go into the post-office, and Jim, on his parole, unable to come out, it naturally followed that he was unable to communicate with any of them. He could have done so by signs through the window, but that he did not do, although he occasionally showed his face there, and exchanged a smile with any of them who happened to be near.

Mr. Groby occasionally went in and out, and in the middle of the afternoon Eveline and her mother emerged from the house, the latter wearing a thick veil.

There were very few of the boys about, and the men had all vanished in different directions.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Mrs. Farrell.

"Towards Silver Bay," replied Eveline.

"Will it be safe for us?"

"As safe as any part of the island."

A minute after they had started towards the bay, the door of the schoolhouse again opened and Mr. Storeby came forth. His face was flushed, and his eyes sparkled with pleasure or excitement. He was attired in a light suit and wore a straw hat with a broad red ribbon. Indeed, he looked quite gallant and gay.

"I've foiled him," he muttered, "and now is my chance."

He sped on after the two ladies, who were now far up the beach, mere dolls in the distance.

By dint of hard running, with pauses to regain breath, he finally overtook them. Hearing footsteps behind her, Eveline started and looked angrily round. But her face changed to indifference when she saw it was only Mr. Storeby. She rather suspected it was the now too troublesome Groby.

"I—I thought," stammered Storeby, "that you would not mind my offering myself as an escort."

"Mamma will, I daresay, be glad to have you here," replied Eveline.

It was rather hard to be transferred to Mrs. Farrell in this way, for the attention was really meant for Eveline. But Storeby did not care. He was, anyway, near Eveline. Mrs. Farrell having graciously said that she would be glad of his company, he fell in by her side, and they walked on together.

Mr. Groby all this time was a prisoner in his room. He had carefully dressed himself also, and was as gallant and gay as Storeby. He had heard that Eveline and her mother were going out, and it was his intention to act as escort—to insist upon it.

On trying to open the door of his room he found it was fast. Somebody had removed the key—probably some time before—and locked it from the outside.

Evidence of that being done was to be seen in the tip of the key that protruded through the lock.

His window, like those in the rest of the house, was barred with iron. He was a prisoner.

"Curses!" he muttered; "who has done this? It is the boys avenging the confinement of their friends."

It was a natural thought, all things considered, but it was not the correct one.

The boys had nothing to do with it. Storeby, the undermaster, was responsible for it. He had noted the extraordinary bearing of Mr. Groby when speaking to Eveline, and being, in a great measure, gone that way himself, was madly jealous, and to thwart the intentions of his self-elected principal, he planned locking him in his room, and carried it out successfully.

In vain did Mr. Groby hammer and hammer at his door. Nobody came to his assistance.

The boys were all outside the house, save those confined in the class-room, and Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo, having cleared away and washed up the dinner-things, were enjoying an afternoon nap in separate secluded corners of the establishment.

It was fully an hour afterwards, when Romeo, who had found a cool candle cupboard a congenial retreat, was aroused from varied dreams by a final effort on the part of Mr. Groby to make somebody hear. He was hammering the door with one of his boots, and yelling his loudest.

Romeo opened his eyes, struggled with the last clouds of sleep, dispersed them, and sat up.

"Gorymash!" he exclaimed, "what am dat?"

He sprang up and hastened to the scene of the disturbance. Groby just then paused for breath, and Romeo succeeded in making himself heard.

"Anything de marrer, massa?" he asked.

"Let me out!" hoarsely replied Mr. Groby.

"Why you not come out?" asked Romeo.

"The key is outside, you fool! Have you any eyes?"

"Two dat berrer dan yours," muttered Romeo, as he laid hold of the key and turned it.

Mr. Groby came forth like an enraged but almost exhausted bull.

"Who did it?" he roared.

"Massa Groby," replied Romeo, "how me know?"

"Couldn't you hear me before?"

"Only heard you dis moment, sar."

"Where have you been this last hour?"

"Outside in de shed, a-choppin' wood."

"Where's your father?"

"He helpin' me wif de choppin'."

"And your grandfather?"

"He been a-stackin' ob it."

Having got through three lies with the most remarkable promptitude, Romeo folded his hands and meekly received a string of curses bestowed upon him and his relatives. Mr. Groby stalked away, but he did not go much farther than the door.

His original intention had been to follow Mrs. Farrell and Eveline without delay, and he was not certain which way they had gone.

He was keenly disappointed. His afternoon was ruined, his get-up a waste of time, and the acidity of his feelings was not lessened when, a short time afterwards, he saw the two ladies returning, with Mr. Storeby as escort.

Unable to restrain his rage, he turned away, and walked up the beach for a furlong or so.

Then he wheeled about, and assuming a casual air, strolled back again. He saw Mr. Storeby take leave of his companions at the door of the school, and with a satisfied smirk fill a pipe with tobacco, and begin to smoke with an air of contentment.

The whole truth flashed upon Mr. Groby, and in a black fury he strode up to his junior.

"Sir," he said, "you locked the door of my room this afternoon!"

"I did," replied Storeby, the peaceful, unabashed.

"Why did you do so infamous a thing?"

"To keep you in."

The coolness of the reply exasperated the other to a pitch of madness.

"Sir," he said, "before you are many days older you shall repent of your unseemly joke!"

"Poof!" exclaimed Storeby, fluttering his fingers contemptuously in the air.

Mr. Groby could not resist it—rage blinded him—and he gave Storeby a push.

The next moment he received a violent blow in the face, and went to the ground with a force that shook him from head to foot.

Looking up, astounded and almost stunned, he saw bending over him a man whose face was hideous with rage.

"You strike me again," hissed Storeby, "and I'll murder you! Do you hear?"

The astonished man heard, without a doubt, but he did not reply. He had not the power of saying a word, and Storeby, with an effort, righting his body, hastened away, not daring to trust himself a moment more in the company of the man he hated in the most deadly manner.

"The look of that man is a revelation," thought Mr. Groby, as he got up and wiped his face with his handkerchief. "Who would have thought such a meagre body could hold so much of the devil in it?"

With a feeling upon him that life at the school was destined to bring him as much trouble as it did its original master, he went into the house and was seen no more until late in the evening.

He kept his room, and by-and-by rang for tea to be brought up to him. Macbeth responded, and supplied it to him in due course, as requested.

He gave him the key, and told him to see that the boys in the class-room were attended to.

"And bring the key back to me," he said.

"De young genelman coming in to tea," said Macbeth. "Perhaps de key do affer we see to dem?"

"Yes," said Mr. Groby.

He ate his tea alone, and sat there brooding until Macbeth reappeared with the key.

"De genelman in de class-room," he said, "send dere compliments, and hope as de beds will be put in de room early, as dey berry tired doin' nuffin'."

"Put them in as soon as you please," muttered Mr. Groby.

"Romeo do dat, sir."

"Romeo or you, or any of you!" cried Mr. Groby, angrily. "Don't bother me about them again to-night."

Macbeth vanished, muttering something about "a genelman dat got powder inside him, 'stead ob flesh and blood," and the master sat by himself another hour.

It was almost dark by that time, and then a sudden thought came to him.

He struck a match and looked at his watch.

"Eight o'clock," he muttered. "The twenty-four hours' parole of Gordon has expired."

He rose and walked downstairs, thinking of what ought to be done with the boy. He came to the conclusion that he must bind him again.

"Another twenty-four hours," he thought, "may see some changes here. Then his parole will not matter a straw."

The boys shut out of the class-rooms were in the dining-hall, making as much noise as usual. Good spirits and fun prevailed among them in spite of troublesome matters.

Mr. Groby, wishing in his heart that he was one of them, left the house and sauntered to the post-office.

The door was open.

"Ha!" he muttered, "visitors to him, I suppose."

He entered and called Gordon by name. There was no reply.

He produced his matchbox and obtained another light.

The first thing that caught his eye was a sentence boldly written on the counter with chalk. It was undoubtedly meant for him, and read as follows:

"My parole expired at half-past seven o'clock, and on its termination I left this place.—JAMES GORDON."

The match went out, and he stood in the dark muttering anathemas on the head of the departed boy. He knew he would not be found at the school, but whither he had gone and with what object were problems he could not at that moment solve.

CHAPTER LIII.

SOME STAGGERERS.



ROMEO was out that evening, but as he was often absent from the school-house when the day's work was done, it was not likely to excite any attention. He was at the castle attending to the requirements of Charley.

As fodder was not available for a bed, he took thither sundry old rugs and sacks, which in a corner of the big hall sufficed for the intelligent beast. For food the stores of vegetables in the post-office for the time were utilised. A very liberal amount could be taken away without the loss being sensibly felt.

Romeo returned about ten o'clock, when the boys were all in bed, and the masters thinking of retiring. In the corridor he waylaid Eveline on the way to her room.

"One moment, missy," he said; "me got sumfin' for you."

The "sumfin'" was a piece of paper neatly folded, but not addressed to her. The reason of the absence of address was obvious from the written matter inside.

"My parole having ended I left my prison. I am in the castle, where I may be for some time. If in danger, please come to me *without hesitation*."

There was no signature, but Eveline knew who it was from. Addressing the negro, she asked him who gave it to him.

"Why, Massa Gordon, ob course," he whispered.

"You know where he is?"

"Yes, missy."

"It is a horrible place for him to be in alone."

Romeo grinned.

"Him not alone," he said; "you go to sleep on dat and hab peace, missy. Me not 'lowed to say more, being bound by de mose frightful oafs to say nuffin'."

"If he is not alone," said Eveline, "I shall not be anxious about him."

She bade Romeo good-night, and glided away. The negro hastened to the kitchen, where he found his relatives anxiously awaiting him.

They gave him a hearty welcome, and what was more to the point, a good supper. Macbeth mentioned the spirits as having been on his mind during the evening, and he especially expressed his personal satisfaction at the coming home of Romeo as the great circumventor of their evil tricks.

"You resse easy," said Romeo, confidently; "dey not come to you wif me 'bout de place."

After supper he had a pipe of herbs—his favourite smoke—and then, with his father and Macbeth, retired. They took with them the two sticks, which Romeo carefully crossed just outside the door. This done, they got to bed with all speed.

As a day's work in the house was pretty stiff for them, they invariably, with their minds at rest, fell asleep without delay. On this occasion they were sound in slumber in a few moments.

But Romeo had not long been unconscious when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and he was rudely awakened.

His first emotion, on seeing a figure bending over him, was that of alarm. He feared that the spirits he had pretended to circumvent, and whom he had spoken of scoffingly, had come to avenge a long series of thwartings and insults.

But, by the light of a lamp the night visitor carried, he saw that it was Mr. Groby, and was awake and alert in a moment.

"I want to know where you have been to-night," demanded the master.

"Out fishin'," replied Romeo.

"What have you caught?"

"Nuffin'."

"Don't lie to me!" said Mr. Groby, fiercely.

It was a fact that Romeo, previous to his going to the castle, had laid out a few night-lines off the shore by the boats, and he repeated his assertion.

"Me lay out de lines," he said, "and de fish come when dey choose, any time afore mornin'."

"Have you seen Gordon?" asked the master.

"Yes, massa."

"Where?"

"Jess as he was comin' out ob de pose-office. He say him repole am ober, and he go juss where he like, and be jiggered to you."

The last part of the sentence was fiction, conceived

and executed by Romeo from a sincere desire to aggravate his interlocutor. Mr. Groby bit his lip.

"Is that all he said?"

"He went away immediately dem words pass him lips."

"Which way did he go?"

Romeo hesitated. Mr. Groby impatiently shook him again.

"Did he go towards the path leading to the castle?"

"He might hab done so," answered Romeo. "Me didn't see him go de oder way."

"You can tell me no more than that?"

"Nothin' more, massa."

Mr. Groby, who was attired in a dressing-gown, and looked very tall and weird by the light of the small lamp he carried, left the room, closing the door with a bang behind him.

"Goodness! what dat?" cried Macbeth, waking up with a start.

"Hush," said Romeo, "it all right now. One of de spirits not see de cross-sticks and come in, but de moment me mention to him de fack dat dey was dere, de beggar clare out wif a rush. Dere not de lease chance ob him comin' back agen."

"What a mercy it was you come home to-night, Romeo!" breathed the old nigger.

"It was," assented the voracious Romeo; "you be tankful, and go to sleep agen."

Macbeth was thankful, and, in accordance with a sound constitution, was soon asleep once more.

Early in the morning Mr. Groby was up. He was before the three negroes, and Romeo, on his way to the kitchen, encountered him. The master had the key of the class-room in his hand.

"Fine mornin', sir," said Romeo.

"It is always a fine morning here, you fool," was the ungracious reply.

"Fool yourself," muttered Romeo, hurrying away, "as you soon find out."

Mr. Groby unlocked the class-room door and looked in. The first apartment was quite bare. He hurried into the second one, and that was empty also.

The window at the back stood open, and the bar that was lying on the floor explained everything.

"Gone to join him," he muttered; "but the bed's could never have been brought here. Let me think for a moment: it was Hamlet, I believe, who professed to place them here."

He hastened out, and sought the two elder negroes in the kitchen. Hearing from Romeo that it was a little early for them to be up, he looked for them in their chamber.

They were dressing as he unceremoniously entered.

"Which of you put the bedding in the class-room last night?" he demanded.

"Bof, sar," answered Macbeth. "Hamlet carry de bedsteads, and me took de bedding."

"You are sure?"

"Massa, if you go to de fust dormelterry, you see it was so."

The bedsteads, Mr. Groby knew, were of the lightest make, considering the material was iron. A boy of average strength could carry one if put together in the ordinary way for travelling. They were made to fold up close, and that could be done without much trouble.

The bedding was also comparatively light, but there was too much of it to be carried in conjunction with the bedsteads.

A double journey to where they had gone was essential.

Mr. Groby looked out of the back-door, asking if there was a ladder in the place. There was a light one, but it was in an outhouse that had not been opened for a week.

So Macbeth assured him, and he had possession of the key.

"Ever since Massa Farrell tell me dat dere burglars or sumfin dat way comin'," he explained, "de ladder not 'lowed to be out on de loose."

"I don't understand it," mused the master, as he walked back, "unless— What a fool I am! I have it! One remained behind while the rest went off with the first lot of bedding, and he lowered the remainder when they came back for it. I shall find them all in the castle. It is their only place of refuge that I know of."

He was satisfied he had hit upon the solution of the mysterious disappearance of the boys, and certain he would find Jim in their company.

First of all, he armed himself with a stout stick, in case he found it necessary to chastise them, or to defend himself if they attacked him.

He was beginning to think that this especial group of boys had a quarrelsome element in them that at a pinch might be dangerous.

He was a resolute man—in some matters, at all events—and he was determined to have them all back at the school by breakfast-time, and to that end went forth up the path to the castle.

He saw nothing on the way to confirm his suspicions, nor was there any sign of the boys when he reached the castle gate.

Having called to them by name in turn, and getting no reply, he crossed the bridge and passed through the first room into the courtyard.

Still there were no indications of their presence, nor any response when he again called to them to come out of their hiding-place.

Espying the door of the hall, he strolled up to it, and on trying it, found that it was not secured.

He threw it open, and immediately staggered back a pace with a cry of alarm.

Standing erect upon its haunches in the doorway was an enormous bear—our old friend Charley.

The right-paw was raised, and ere Mr. Groby could summon the nerve to beat a retreat, it descended upon his head and dashed him senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER LIV.

MR. NAP FARRELL AND HIS DREADED FOE.



THE smugglers' craft, carrying the two prisoners, boldly steered for Silver Bay, and were, with some of the men, put into the boat and sent ashore.

The party hastened to the chine.

The leader had previously received directions from Vampa where to go and whom to look for.

The man was making his way to the old hiding-place of Espardo Reonardo, getting somewhat confused by the changed aspect of the glen, which, of course, did not accord with the description furnished him, when he was joyfully hailed from the great cave above.

Looking up, he saw Espardo Reonardo standing at the mouth of it.

"Hail, comrade!" he cried.

"I salute you, senor," answered the smuggler.

"What brings you here?" asked Reonardo.

"A boat, in which were Vampa and other good men. Giuseppo sent us hither."

"And why is not Giuseppo with you?"

"It is a long story, senor. Would it not come better from the lips of Vampa?"

"Possibly. Let him come hither."

"We have two prisoners."

"Bring them also."

The man conveyed back to Vampa the tidings that Espardo Reonardo was at the appointed spot, not dreaming of his having been away and returned under such extraordinary circumstances.

Vampa immediately gave orders for all to land but two men, who were to take the boat further on and seek a hiding-place for her.

Lightened of so much of her burden, she was easily managed, and Vampa, with eight men and his two

prisoners, whose hands were now secured behind them, started for the chine.

Both Mr. Farrell and Chorker were familiar figures to Reonardo, and he was astounded when he beheld them being led captive. But he was not, for some reason, particularly pleased.

Drawing back, he waited in the cave until the party, guided by the first-comer, toiled up the slope.

"Enter and welcome," he said. "It is a poor place to receive such guests in."

"I greet you, senor," said Vampa. "My message from Giuseppe is that he is coming across the island and will join you here."

"In the name of all that is pernicious, why could he not come with you? Yet it matters not so much now. How fares it with you, Senor Farrell?"

The schoolmaster stared at him and shivered.

"I am not well," he answered, wretchedly. "Thanks to the treatment I have received, there is little life left in me."

"And this old sea fraud of yours," continued Reonardo—"this land-fish? Say, then, how is it you honour me with your company?"

"I will tell you, senor," said Vampa; "but first let me ask if you have any wine?"

"A small store," replied Reonardo, "and no food to speak of, but we will get more by-and-by, as I have a friend on the island who will supply us with all we require. Groby is his name. You know him, friend Farrell?"

Reonardo was in a boisterously offensive mood, and as he put the question he smacked the shrinking schoolmaster upon the back.

"He was an assistant of mine," answered Mr. Farrell, with a haggard stare.

"Ay, then, is it not good for us to be friends?" cried Reonardo. "We have entered into a compact, this Groby and I. I have exchanged something I never had for something he has no right to give me. There's a conundrum for you. Answer it if you can."

"It is beyond me," drearily replied Mr. Farrell. "I am getting confused with the many events that surround my unhappy life."

"How far does this cave penetrate?" asked Vampa.

"Faith, I cannot tell you," replied Reonardo, with a careless backward glance. "I have not gone far from the mouth of it."

"If I might venture in with a word," said Chorker, "I should like to say that this 'ere cave goes a long way inter the earth. I've been at least a mile down it, and nearly got lost."

"What were you doing here?" asked Mr. Farrell.

"Looking for what there ain't—hidden treasure," said Chorker. "It's a take-in is this 'ere cave."

"Remove the cords from these dogs," said Reonardo, "and place a man on guard at the mouth

of the cave. If one of them so much as puts his nose into the open air, let his head be blown off!"

"Capen," said Chorker, saluting respectfully, "might I have a word with you?"

"Yes, but only one, as I am impatient to hear the story that will tell me how it is you all unnerved me by coming here."

"What I wants, capen," whispered Chorker, as the pair drew aside, "is to *jine* you."

"And what would a thing like you do for our bold band?" asked Reonardo.

"I'd look arter *him*, anyways," said Chorker, pointing at the schoolmaster. "I'll bet he wouldn't get away with my eye on him."

"Not a bad thought," said Reonardo, boisterously. "Let dog eat dog if you will. Farrell, here is the sentinel placed over you. Beware of him, for he is savage and remorseless, like all traitorous friends. He is one of us, is this bold, bad man. What is your name, my gallant recruit?"

"Chorker, capen."

"A goodly name, surely. Get down the cave with your charge, and don't, as you value your lives, either of you come near me without being summoned. If you do——" He finished by significantly touching the weapons in his belt.

"Come up with you," said Chorker to the schoolmaster, "and don't you give me any of *your* trouble, or you'll rue it, as I, being one of the band of galyant smugglers, will act according."

"Chorker," said Mr. Farrell, "I beg of you to treat me with courtesy and consideration. I found you poor, and I brought you with me across the sea to the home you have had for two years or more. During that time you have been well fed, clothed, and allowed to do as you please."

"If you hadn't wanted me," said Chorker, roughly, "you wouldn't have hired me, so don't make a virtue of *that*."

"You are an ungrateful hound," said Mr. Farrell, plucking up a bit of spirit.

"None of your insolence," growled Chorker, giving him a push; "on yer goes, out of the sight of these yere gentlemen, who must reglar loathe the sight of you, as I does."

Speaking in this fashion to catch the ear of the Spanish ruffians and curry favour with them, Chorker hustled his late master along the cave, out of sight, and Espardo Reonardo, grimly twirling his moustache, said:

"It does one good to have the heel on these English dogs."

"They are not worthy of the name of Englishmen," said Vampa; "make the most of that pair, for you will not meet many like them of the race."

Having made and lighted cigarettes, the two men

sat down apart from the rest, and proceeded to discuss matters that were of import to them.

"First tell me, my Vampa," said Reonardo, "how you fared with the cargo you ran at Gibraltar?"

"Fairly well," replied Vampa, "but we lost some of it through the accursed stupidity of one of our men, who, while climbing the rock, let a big bale slip from his shoulders and roll into the sea."

"For myself," said Reonardo, gloomily, "I am proscribed, having been fool enough to do a bit of business in one of the Royal palaces."

"That was weak."

"I grant it, my Vampa, but we all err now and then. For a time I must remain in hiding, until I can make arrangements for my safety by bribing the palace officials. When that is done I shall be a free man. Meanwhile I am in hiding here, having returned a few days ago. I have been fed by a stranger, one of the masters of the school."

"How won you his heart?"

"There is not much heart in it on either side. He met me here, and asked what I was doing on the island. I explained to him that I was a poor smuggler who had to hide, and craved his indulgence. He walked with me for awhile, and presently asked me many questions about the island of Minorca; whether it would be easy to get a priest there who would perform the marriage ceremony between him and a girl, and ask no questions. I assured him that there were scores who would do it for a few ducats."

"They would all do it, my Espardo."

"They would. Then he thought again awhile, and presently asked me if it would be possible for me to convey him and the girl to Minorca in a boat. I told him I expected one to call for me, and then we struck a bargain. He was to feed me, and find me with wine, while I lay here, and I was to take him and his bride, an unwilling one he was sure she would be, away in my boat to Minorca."

"What manner of man is he?"

"A dullard—none too young, but infatuated with a pretty face. But the gist of the matter lies in the fact that it is *my* lady-love he aspires to."

Vampa stared at him a moment, and then laughed.

"Does he know that?" he asked.

"Not he," answered Reonardo, with a sardonic grin; "he has no notion of it. He undertakes to have the girl ready here when the time comes. On our arrival at Minorca I will see to the priest, and make the nuptial arrangements."

"Hey, then, Reonardo, will you sacrifice so much?"

"I will sacrifice *him* at the right moment, my Vampa. A knife between his ribs will end it as far as he goes. Then I will take his place as bridegroom. The priest will neither know nor care who it is that espouses the young and beautiful Eveline."

"It will be a merry business."

"But I must await the removal of the Royal ban from me," sighed Reonardo, "and that will take time. Still, it will be done, and the Royal memory being kept by the officials, it must and will be extinguished with bribes. The cunning dogs only put out the bill offering a reward for my capture so that I might offer them a price to withdraw it. It is a strange world we live in."

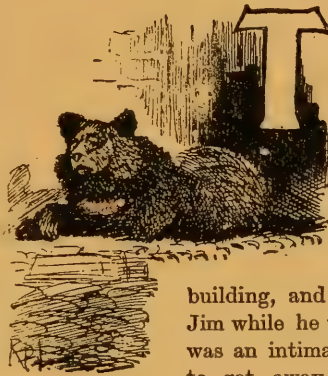
"Especially that spot we call Spain."

"And now, Vampa, for your story."

Vampa proceeded to relate that which the reader already knows, concerning the capture of the launch, and the subsequent events, down to the time when it was sent to the bottom of the sea. No repetition of it is needed here.

CHAPTER LV.

LIFE IN THE OLD CASTLE.



THE recent prisoners in the class-room were in the castle, and Jim Gordon was with them. It was Morse who conceived the plan of escaping and taking up their quarters in the sombre old

building, and the letter he sent to Jim while he was in the post-office was an intimation of his intention to get away that evening about twilight.

Jim was desired, immediately on the expiration of his parole, to hasten to the castle and await them there.

As Mr. Groby opined, it required two journeys to get the bedding away, but they succeeded in conveying it to the castle without attracting any intention.

A room adjoining Morse's laboratory was selected as a sleeping-chamber, and the banquet-hall was the very place for a living-room.

Charley, the bear, was overwhelmed with delight when he found he was to have such goodly company. He caressed them all in his lumbering way, but he positively hugged Jim again and again, until his attentions became somewhat oppressive.

Romeo had undertaken to provision them.

The boys passed a quiet night, with Charley sleeping by the door, as good a watch-dog as they could desire. In the morning, while the boys were dressing, the event in connection with Mr. Groby, which we have

already described, took place. Secure in the guardianship of Charley, they had omitted to lock the door.

Hearing the commotion attending the fall of Mr. Groby, they rushed out and were just in time. Charley in his zeal in the cause of his friends had lifted the senseless man from the ground between his mighty paws, and was about to give him the hug that had proved so deadly to the smuggler on the other side of the island.

"Charley," cried Jim, "lie down, old fellow."

The bear, still holding Mr. Groby in his paws, looked round, and obeying the motion of Jim's hand, laid him gently down.

Then the boys went up and looked at him.

"There is no blood visible, and he is breathing," said Morse. "He is merely senseless from a blow Charley gave him."

"What is to be done with him?" asked Terry.

It was a question that must be quickly answered, for if the master came round and saw them the moral force of the blow he received would be gone.

If he only knew of the bear being there, the probability was that he would not believe the boys were in the castle, and giving it a wide berth in future, would leave them in peace.

"We had better carry him outside and leave him to recover," suggested Jim. "Charley can be kept in sight of him, and he will assume that he was carried there by the bear. Give a hand and let us get him into position."

They found the master rather heavy, owing to his being limp, but they got him outside in a minute or so and laid him in the open air.

Jim then bade his friends retire, while he waited with Charley, keeping well out of sight in the gloomy chamber, and furthermore hidden by the heavy body of the bear.

"Watch him, lad," whispered Jim, and Charley, with his head on one side, lolled out his tongue knowingly, as if he perfectly understood.

The brute kept guard by the gateway under the old portcullis, sitting upon his haunches, a terrifying object to an ordinary man.

Jim, crouching down behind his shaggy friend, kept his eyes upon the still form of Mr. Groby.

Presently he stirred, opened his eyes, and sat up. He seemed to be dazed for a time, but his brain clearing, he saw the bear, and with all haste scrambled to his feet.

Charley uttered a low growl.

"Steady, boy," whispered Jim.

Mr. Groby staggered away, the image of mortal terror. All his nerve was gone, and when Charley dropped on all-fours and made a movement forward, he turned and fled down the path at the risk of falling and breaking a limb or, it might be, his neck.

But nothing happened to him while he was in sight or hearing, and Jim, having waited for a time, and nothing occurring to give rise to fear of further disturbance, he rejoined his friends.

"Groby has been well scared," he said. "There is little danger of his troubling us again for a day or so."

"There is one danger you have overlooked," said Morse. "He may organise a party to come and kill Charley. There are Martin and others who would not hesitate to join him."

"That has to be thought of," rejoined Jim, thoughtfully, "but without Martin none would move. Do you think we might trust him with the secret of our being here?"

"We trust Romeo," said Felton.

"Yes, but Romeo is one of us, and directly he will never blab. I for one believe Martin is a friend, and there is Changeling. I would swear by them."

"Suppose we invited them to join us?" suggested Ganthony.

"No," said Jim. "We do not want a colony here. But we will confide in them, so that if a movement is made against Charley they will not join it, and that will practically upset everything."

As Romeo was expected some time in the morning, a communication was prepared to be sent to Martin, and by him shown to Changeling. The substance of it was that the boys were in hiding, and the story of Mr. Groby's scare, with the deductions to be drawn therefrom.

Breakfast was then got ready, and after it Morse went up to the battlements and cautiously surveyed the country round.

He saw two or three small boats in the distance and a steamer near the horizon, but nothing to show that any movement was being made towards the castle.

Down below everything appeared to be absolutely still.

True to his appointment, Romeo came hurrying up about eleven o'clock. He brought with him two fowls recently killed, and confessed to having terminated their existence half an hour before, some hard biscuits, two big loaves of bread, and some tea and sugar.

He was in high glee about something, which appeared presently to be the story Mr. Groby told about the bear on his return to the school.

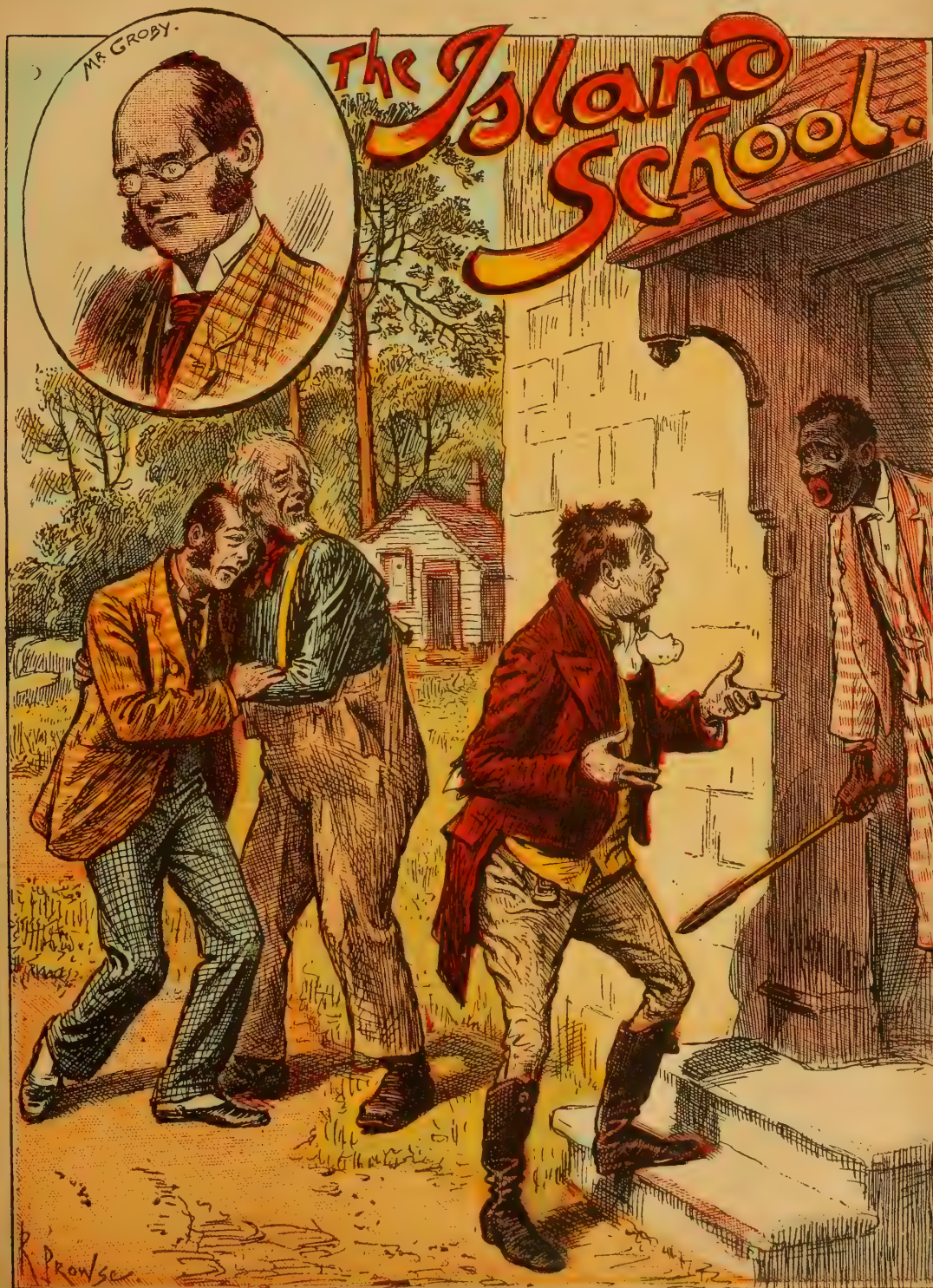
"De way he come back," he said, "jess as if he been pounded to death. 'All ob you keep way from de castle. It am full ob bears,' he say. Den he told 'em he had been 'tacked and had to run for him life, and he gib my sides a splitting as I sit in de candle cupboard listenin' and laughin'. It better dan any show me eber come 'cross."

"I am afraid he alarmed Miss Eveline," said Morse.

"Not a bit, Massa Morse," said Romeo, his black face shining with delight.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



"Johominy and butterscotch!" exclaimed Romeo. "So you come back. If me was you, me would not show that face to the Missus, dat's all."

"She knows all about Charley," said Jim, quietly; "and now I think of it, some of the Council not here know of his existence too."

"We may trust them to keep mum about it," said Morse.

Romeo was unable to stay long. He had enough work to do in the morning to occupy all his time, and coming away entailed a rush later on to get the dinner ready.

After he was gone his story was thought over and talked about, and it was soon seen that Groby had himself helped to keep them safe from intrusion by speaking of the castle being full of bears. He would avoid being made ridiculous by its being proved that there was but one, and that tame as a rabbit in proper hands.

But in any case it would be necessary to keep watch in the daytime, and they arranged to do it in turns from the convenient battlements, which commanded a view of the country in every direction save to the rear, where the sombre wood was.

Morse, as usual, was busy with experiments whenever he got the chance, and Terry, as they lounged about the hall, devoutly hoped that he would not bring about an explosion.

"He is so cool and calculating," said Jim, "and proceeds step by step in all he does, I have no fear of his making a mistake."

The day passed, and they had nothing to give rise to anxiety. What Mr. Groby believed had become of them they could only guess. Possibly he believed they had again taken to the wood. If so, he would not attempt to seek them out. Romeo again appeared shortly after dark, and brought the news that Mr. Groby had just stolen away alone in the direction of the chine.

"Me see him come out ob de house," said Romeo, "look 'bout him in de sneakin' way ob a pusson dat goin' whar he wish noborry to know, den walk off at de top ob him speed. He up to sumfin', sure."

"There were voices heard in the chine cave," said Jim, "and he said they were nothing."

"I can find out who is in the cave," said Morse; "we have one outlet of it here."

"But you must carry a light."

"I can carry all the light I want, Jim, in my pocket. I was thinking over this very matter to-day, and now or never is the time to find out if there is really any-one hidden in the cave."

"If so, he is a friend of Groby's."

"No doubt."

Morse was bent on going at once, and having taken out a small lantern—it was barely three inches high—from a drawer, and thrust it into his pocket, he raised the trap-door and descended into the cave.

He desired the door to be closed, but said it might

be cautiously raised at intervals to listen for sounds that might arise.

"If I am discovered," he said, "I shall at once beat a retreat, and signal it to you by three minor explosions, about as loud," he added, reflectively, "as ten fog-signals of a railway rolled into one."

He disappeared, and they were left alone. Not caring for the neighbourhood of the laboratory, with its many secrets, more or less dangerous, they returned to the banquet-hall.

Romeo stayed with them an hour, and he took back with him a long letter written by Jim for Eveline.

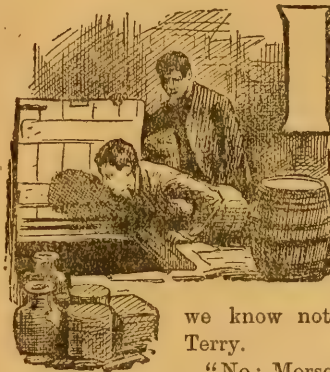
It was mainly a full explanation of their position, asking her to do her best to thwart any attempt to come to the castle.

"We are watching over you," were his final words; "no foe can approach the school by day without our knowing it. I wish the Spaniards were finished with, but with Groby, in whom I am sorely disappointed, at the head of affairs, nothing more can for the present be done."

Romeo took away this letter, with the assurance that he would faithfully deliver it, and he kept his word.

CHAPTER LVI.

MORSE RETURNS WITH A STORY.



"It must be twelve o'clock," said Jim, as he drew out his watch. "Ten minutes past, and not a sound from Morse."

"He may have lost himself in some of the intricacies of the cave

we know nothing of," suggested Terry.

"No; Morse will not do anything by guess-work. He is detained by something neither he nor we expected."

"Shall I listen again?" said Ganthony.

"Do," said Jim.

Ganthony walked softly into the laboratory as if he were treading on eggs, and turned back the trap-door with the care he would have bestowed on moving some sheet of precious crystal.

Lying down, he thrust his head into the opening and listened.

"I hear a footstep," he said, after a pause.

"Quick or slow?" inquired Jim.

"Leisurely enough."

"It is Morse, and all is well."

One by one they gathered round the trap-door. It was almost ludicrous to see the respect they showed towards the explosive materials in the laboratory, by walking on tip-toe and avoiding a collision with anything in the form of a bottle or jar, and the footsteps ere long became very distinct.

They were of the most leisurely description, and Jim in a whisper remarked that they reminded him of the way Morse had of walking when he was in deep thought.

It was Morse, but he was so long in ascending the steps that they began to think he would never arrive at the top.

But he appeared at last, with his face, notwithstanding the leisurely nature of his movements, lighted up with excitement.

"Stand back, boys," he said, "and let me come up. That's it; I'll close the door myself. I forgot to mention, when I went away, that I left a jar of stuff fermenting which I don't think will stand the *least* jarring. It will not explode in the ordinary way, but just fizz up and send out a fume that will render you senseless in a moment. Ganthony, you have your foot near it at this moment. For goodness' sake don't touch it."

"I wish you would label your precious stuff," grumbled Ganthony; "put a board against them, with 'Keep off the explosives or you will be hoisted up to the evening star or be despatched to the constellation of Hercules,' or something else that would give ordinary people the tip."

"If it had been really dangerous," said Morse, coolly, as he lowered the trap-door, "of course I should not have forgotten it. But this composition is comparatively harmless."

"It doesn't blow up a party," said Terry; "it only knocks him down as if he has been hit with a pole-axe."

"I intend to invent something," said Morse, "that will shoot people sideways. It is my desire to cater for all tastes! But come along and hear something that will astound you. For myself, I must confess that once in a way I am in a state of chaos, like something revolving in the air after the explosion."

"You came along leisurely enough," said Felton, "we thought you were lame or blindfolded."

"I had to collect my thoughts," said Morse, "and after that put them in order. Some people are content to just get their thoughts together, higgledy-piggledy, anyhow, and then they begin to talk. That is not my style of doing things. I knew you boys would, as soon as you saw me, want to know what had detained me so long, and I wished to be in a position to lay everything clearly before you."

"So you came along leisurely?"

"I did."

"In the dark?"

"Yes."

"Just like Morse," murmured Jim.

They returned to the banquet-hall, which, as we at a previous time pointed out, was used as a council-chamber by the leaders of the school, and there being a goodly supper laid out, they sat down to partake of it.

Charley was outside in the courtyard playing watch-dog.

"We thought it better to wait for you, Morse," said Terry.

"Unwise," replied Morse, shaking his head; "suppose anything had happened to me? Like the good fellows you are, you would have been terribly upset, and so lost your appetites. The supper would have been thrown away."

"One way of looking at it," said Jim. "Will you have a little fowl?"

"I can eat anything," replied Morse; "the air of the cave appears to me to be a fine tonic."

"Can you talk while you eat?"

"I think so. I should hardly be human if I could not."

"Well, what have you discovered?"

"In the first place, there are a dozen men in the cave."

"Whew!"

The exclamation was general. It was a piece of information that rather staggered them.

"There are the men who levanted in that boat from the other side of the island," pursued Morse, "and also the arch-conspirator against the peace of the school, Espardo Reonardo."

"He there!" cried Jim. "Why, I thought he was proscribed."

"That is one of the reasons for his being here. He is in hiding. But more of that anon. The smugglers brought two prisoners with them. Guess who they are."

"Do you mean to tell us that they have got Chorker and Farrell?"

It was Jim who put the question, and Morse answered, gleefully:

"Yes; they got hold of them at sea. But let me explain, once for all, that part of what I tell you I learnt from conversation going on here and there among the fellows in the cave, and part I had to guess—to deduct, in short, from the conversation and manner of the people there."

"You have the whole thing correct, for a million," said Terry.

"Thanks," returned Morse; "I believe you mean what you say, if I cannot fully believe I deserve it. The launch went to sea short of oil," he resumed,

"and it was helpless when the smugglers' boat came up. The two duffers on board were made prisoners and brought on here. Chorker has joined the enemy, and is playing sentry over Farrell, who is in the lowest depths of abject misery."

"This is staggering news," said Terry.

"But who do you think was there to-night? Well, you will imagine it was Groby, after what Romeo told us, and Groby it was. He was hobnobbing with that scoundrel Reonardo, and a blackguard called Vampa. They were discussing the details of a nefarious plot. Jim, it concerns you most, although it concerns us all. It is to carry off Eveline to Minorca, and marry her—to whom?—why, to Groby, by force."

Jim sat very quiet, but he was terribly pale, and his under-lip quivered.

"I understand the change in Groby more clearly than ever, now," he said; "he has fallen off the pedestal of decent manhood, and plunged headlong into the slough of depravity."

"The plot," said Morse, "is to be carried out to-morrow night. It seems that early this morning Reonardo received intelligence of his friends having succeeded in bribing the officials of the palace he robbed, so that he need no longer fear prosecution. He is therefore at liberty to return to Minorca, or to roam at will in any portion of the Spanish dominions. A felucca brought him the good tidings, and to-morrow it will be used to convey Groby and Eveline and Reonardo, with a fitting escort, to Minorca, where, as I have learnt, some scoundrel priest—one of the few who disgrace their Church, even as other supposed good men disgrace their particular body—will perform the marriage ceremony."

"It was Reonardo who originally wanted Eveline," said Jim. "I do not understand it."

"I do," said Morse. "When Reonardo returned to the island, he was alone and friendless. He entered into a compact with Groby, whom he seems to have become acquainted with, to help in this matter, in return for food and a safe hiding-place. Reonardo intends to play him false in the end, as one might expect."

"But that will not save Eveline," muttered Jim.

"No, that is for us to do," said Morse; "there will be time to-morrow to act. Meanwhile, we might settle on something to be done with Chorker and Farrell."

"Are they worth helping?" asked Felton.

"Farrell is a cur," said Jim, "but I am not disposed to be hard on him. We had better have a fool at the head of the school than a knave, as Groby has proved himself to be."

"Hear, hear!" cried Ganthonny.

"Well," said Morse, "nothing now remains to us to-night but to lock up the crib and get as much sleep

as we can between this hour and sunrise. Then we must proceed to act, and if we do not circumvent Groby and all his works, we ought to suffer, that is all I can say."

"There is something to do," remarked Jim.

"My place will be underground," said Morse, gaily; "I am the sapper and miner who will astonish them suddenly, if so be we decide to act in that direction. But, boys, I have had a fatiguing evening, and must away to rest. I see the beds are made. Who was chambermaid to-day?"

"Felton," said Terry.

"I trust there are no bumps," said Morse, "for my present feelings prompt me to long for the froth of the sea as a pillow, and the fluff of groundsel seed for a bed. The first who wakes in the morning will please call me."

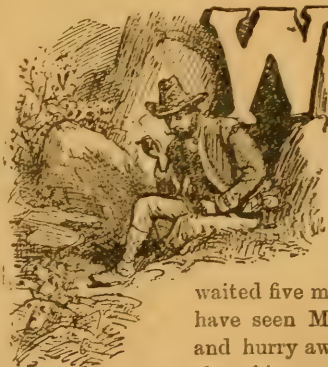
"I shall not sleep for awhile," said Jim, "and will go out and keep Charley company. There is a moon to-night, and it will be very pleasant."

"Poor Jim," sighed Terry, as the door closed, "it is the peril of Eveline that upsets him. He would never think of his own. But he will not sleep to-night."

Terry was right. Jim sought no repose, but with Charley he stole down to the schoolhouse and kept watch over it the livelong night.

CHAPTER LVII.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.



WHEN the night was past and Jim felt that there was not the least probability of any attempt to carry off Eveline being made, he hastened back to the castle.

But had he

waited five minutes more he would have seen Mr. Groby come forth and hurry away in the direction of the chine. The master was in

haste, with the double object of getting clear away without being observed, and making his arrangements with Espardo Reonardo with the least possible delay.

Up to a certain point this had been done, but there were still many details to arrange so as to ensure, as Mr. Groby thought, the complete success of his nefarious scheme.

He was expected; the Spaniard was on the watch for him from the elevated mouth of the cave, where

he sat upon the ground, with the everlasting cigarette between his lips.

Mr. Groby toiled up the slope, and was received cordially, Reonardo kissing the tips of his fingers towards him, and hailing him as "my Groby."

"I am a little late, I fear," said the master, "but in my anxiety to be here at the appointed time I kept awake more than half the night, and when I did fall asleep I was very sound."

"There is time for all we have to do," replied Reonardo, "for I have nothing to suggest. My boat is there, my men are ready, and I am prepared to convey you and your intended bride away at any hour you may name."

"It must be in the afternoon," said Mr. Groby. "She has made her arrangements to come out with her mother, sketching. The girl is clever in that direction. She is mistress of the brush, insomuch that one day, if she has the opportunity, she will make a name. I hope to have the opportunity of developing her talents."

"And of profiting by her gifts?" said Reonardo, pleasantly.

"I beg pardon?"

"Nay, do not be offended. I merely spoke of your probable action as I would of myself. It is enough. At what hour will you be here?"

"We shall not be here at all, and that is the mischief of it," was the gloomy answer, "for she intends going in the other direction, half-way up the path leading to that infernal castle. She says there is a view from there she especially desires to paint."

"That," said Reonardo, reflecting, "entails some additional trouble."

"You might work your way round by the wood and seize on her there. Two or three men would suffice."

The Spaniard shook his head.

"A half-dozen at least would be required," he asserted. "Carrying a woman against her will is hard work. She will kick and scream, and fight to the last. They all do it on principle, even though they are willing to be carried away."

"Well, half a dozen, then. Surely between now and the afternoon you will be able to get your men into position?"

"Yes, it shall be done."

"In a half-willing way Eveline has accepted me as escort," said Mr. Groby, "and when the time comes I may be of some assistance."

"Yes," said Reonardo, with a charming simplicity, "you might keep the mother quiet. Or help to bind her limbs and gag her. It will be a painful necessity, but it must be done."

"The road through the wood must be very circuitous?" said Mr. Groby.

"It is, entailing much climbing, and covering miles of almost untrodden ground."

"You would not be back here with your burden until night?"

"No. It will be a work of many hours. My men must have rest."

"How, then, would it do to secure *both*," said Mr. Groby, "and keep them hidden until nightfall, when you could perform the lighter journey by the beach. By making a **slight** circuit, and keeping close to the water, you would avoid observation."

"Would they not be missed?"

"Having secured them, I could return to the school and account for their lengthened absence. Afterwards I would meet you by the chine, say at nine o'clock."

"You are clever, my Groby," said Reonardo, placing his hand affectionately on the master's shoulder, "you have a head. The girl will be nothing to carry by the easier route."

"I could also devise something to keep all of the house within doors," continued Mr. Groby—"amusement of some sort, in which the men could share. It shall be seen to."

"All is arranged, then," said the master, after a pause, as he got upon his feet. "If you are there by three o'clock it will be time enough. For the present, adieu."

"Au revoir, my Groby. What a head you have for detail, to be sure! Half-way up the path to the castle at the hour of three. We shall be there."

Reonardo kissed his hand by way of a parting salute, and Mr. Groby, feeling confident that he had everything now in trim order, hastened gaily down the slope.

Reonardo watched him with a smile upon his face until he disappeared. Then he turned his face to the interior of the cave, put his fingers to his mouth, and sent forth a shrill whistle. In response, another whistle was heard from out the depths of the gloomy cavern, and shortly after Vampa strolled into view.

"I saw the gull," he said; "what of him?"

Reonardo gave him the substance of the interview, and Vampa appeared to be exceedingly amused.

"As arranged," he said, "we can settle him before going to Minorca?"

Reonardo nodded approval.

"It will save the trouble of conveying him there, and the possible investigation as to the cause of his death."

"My Vampa," said Reonardo, placing his hands upon the shoulders of the other, a favourite action of his when he wanted a favour done, "that will be your task. Choose your own time and place."

"And the price?" asked Vampa. "One must have a business-like understanding in these matters."

"One hundred ducats."

"Good. I am content."

So the bargain was sealed, and the two utter scoundrels sat down side by side to discuss in whispers the minor details of their counterplot.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MORSE MAKES A MORNING EXPEDITION.



MORSE, the calculator, was awake right early. He was, indeed, the first of the band, excepting Jim Gordon, to open his eyes. Instead of awakening the rest, he rose up quietly, washed and dressed, and scribbled the following note, afterwards placing it in a conspicuous position on the table.

"I have gone below! Do nothing until I return.

"R. M."

Jim, returning from his long vigil below, was the first to see it, and having read it through, he put it into his pocket and lay down to rest.

He did not think it essential that any of his chums should be immediately informed of its import.

Ere he had been long asleep the rest awoke, and seeing him there sound asleep, left him in peace while the morning meal was being prepared. The discovery of the open trap-door showed whither Morse had gone.

Felton, in the capacity of sentry, went upon the battlements to keep watch. There he was presently joined by Jim, who, with a small pocket telescope of extra good quality, carefully surveyed the surrounding scenery.

Below, the boys were seen running about like ants, until the clanging of a bell summoned them within doors. Then Mr. Groby was seen returning from the direction of the chine, walking gaily as a man who was particularly well pleased with something.

Jim was able to see his features, with the aid of the telescope, very distinctly, and it flashed upon him that the man had been working evil. But he could not, of course, guess exactly what he had been doing.

Near the house he was met by Storeby, his junior master, who addressed him with apparent rudeness, and some angry words were undoubtedly exchanged, ere Mr. Groby hastened into the house.

After that there was a clear scene for awhile, and

Jim went down to the council-chamber, where a simple breakfast awaited him.

Terry was not long in disposing of his, so that he could change guard with Felton, and as he was about to vanish, Morse appeared with startling suddenness amongst them.

"Give me something to eat," he said; "the air of that cave is, as I before remarked, a tonic."

"You have something to tell us," said Jim. "When you have, your appetite is generally affected."

Morse laughed in his quiet way, and fell to with his breakfast. In a few minutes he began his story.

"You know I have been into the cave," he said, "and, of course, I have paid a visit to those who are at present abiding there. Chorker is keeping guard over Nap, and bullying him like the old ruffian he is; but that is a small matter. The chief thing I have to speak of is a scheme afloat to seize Eveline this afternoon, and bear her away to Minorca. Groby has arranged it. The fool is in love with her, and thinks she will, under pressure, yield to him, and become his wife."

"There is at least a quarter of a century difference in their ages," exclaimed Terry, indignantly.

"Not quite so much as that," said Morse. "I judge there is about fourteen years' difference between them. That is not so much, as men and women go. The chief thing is that this man, placed at the head of the school by a variety of circumstances, violates all the principles of truth and honour in attempting to carry away Eveline Farrell."

"He ought to be shot," said Felton.

"For him there is no profit in store in the matter, as I have before suggested," said Morse; "it is Reonardo who hopes to reap all the benefit. He is the originator of the chaotic state of the school. This afternoon Groby comes up here with Eveline and her mother, to a spot midway between here and the ground below. Reonardo with some men are to be in ambush to seize and bind and gag her. She will afterwards, at nightfall, be conveyed to Silver Bay, where a boat will be in waiting to convey her to Minorca. I think you will agree with me that a more dastardly plot was never conceived by man."

"There is one gleam of comfort in it, even if it were carried out," said Jim, with a grim smile. "The arch-villain Groby will not profit by it."

"But of course it will not be carried out," said Morse.

"It must not be," said Jim.

"In a time like this we must not be dainty," continued Morse. "Reonardo and his men can be watched for, and we must give them pepper. The back of the castle commands a view of the wood, and they must come by that route to the appointed spot. I suggest that we look up a suitable point of vantage and let fly into them without warning."

An exclamation of assent to the proposition came from every lip.

"We have our rifles," resumed Morse, "and ammunition. So far there are the materials to give Reonardo a very warm reception. Suppose I, now, with Jim, look up a suitable post for us to lie in waiting for them?"

He had by this time finished his breakfast, and with Jim he left the old council-chamber, or dining-hall, or whatever it may have been used for in the olden time.

Hitherto the back portion of the castle had been rarely visited. It was known to contain all the usual offices for the domestics and retainers of the original owners, and that it was not the most inviting part of the building.

In fact, it was a series of dark passages and meagre chambers until the old kitchen was reached, a spacious place with a gallery at one end.

In that gallery were two windows, from which the wood could be seen. They were glazed with horn, and opened lattice-fashion.

The gallery was reached by means of a steepish staircase from the kitchen. The two boys ascended it, opened a window, and looked out.

"You see," said Jim, "that the trees are thinner here, and he will be sure to look for the towers of the castle to guide him. The path is only a few feet to the left—round the corner, I may say."

"Yes," assented Morse, "he will come this way. Now the window is long and narrow, but only a portion of it opens. We must remove some of the horn from either side of the lattice, and do it in a way that will lead to the assumption, if it is noticed, that it has been damaged long ago. This is the style of thing."

With his elbow Morse knocked a hole in one of the panes of horn, and pointed out that anyone this side of it could watch without being seen, and use a rifle, when necessary, with deadly effect.

Jim quite agreed with him, and then made additional openings in the window, until they had sufficient loopholes of a rugged nature for their purpose.

In all they would have five guns to bear upon the enemy, and in Jim's opinion that was about as many as would show up to carry out the plot.

These preliminary preparations made, they hastened back to their friends, who had, during their absence, been busy preparing the rifles for use.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE RESULT OF THE AMBUSH.



FAITHFUL to his agreement, Reonardo, with six men, started for the appointed spot, leaving the cave about an hour before noon.

He was an old hand at traveling in strange districts, and, having got his bearings in the wood, he kept on pretty straight for the castle. He expected to see it ahead in about three hours, and

sure enough, about that time, coming to where the wood thinned, he saw its massive towers rising above the trees.

All he had to do now was to keep it on the left, and, having passed it, to bear downwards where the path would presently rise into view.

The men were called upon to halt, and they partook of food and wine. During the meal Reonardo more particularly gave them instructions concerning what they were individually to do.

Two were appointed to seize Eveline, and a third to bind her arms and gag her. Two more were to assist Mr. Groby in keeping Mrs. Farrell quiet, and the rest were to be ready to give especial assistance, if so instructed.

Reonardo was confident of being successful. It never dawned upon him that anything could seriously arise as an obstruction. It was all a matter between him and the confiding master who had so innocently played into his hands.

"Comrades," he said, when they had eaten and drunken their fill, "one cigarette, and then to the trysting-place. In about an hour our little bird, that is to walk so cheerfully into the snare, will arrive. Let us smoke, and away."

To some there it was their last smoke on earth, but they had no inkling of the fate in store for them, and laughed and chatted gaily until the word of command to resume their march was given.

On they went, threading their way between the trees until they were within a few yards of the moat at the back of the castle.

Reonardo halted and looked round him. It was the first time he had ever been on that particular spot, and the sombre appearance of the huge building impressed him.

His eyes roamed over it, until they were lifted to the window of the gallery where the youngsters were

in ambush. To his amazement he saw a number of rifle-muzzles thrust out, and, with a cry of alarm, he darted aside.

"Retreat, comrades!" he yelled—"to the wood!"

It was too late, as far as the men were concerned. Reonardo had seen the rifles and knew his peril. They could only listen bewildered to his cry of warning, and wonder what it all meant.

Ere they could retreat, five rifles cracked shortly and sharply on the air, and five men fell.

Two rolled into the moat, where they went down and were seen no more, and the other three fell in a heap to the ground.

At that short distance the aim of the boys was but too true, and for every shot a life was taken.

Jim Gordon, as leader, had bidden each of his friends take a man in order, so that two shots were not in any case wasted on one.

The sixth smuggler, recovering from the shock of the complete surprise, plunged into the wood in the wake of Reonardo, and they fled on for awhile, each fearing they knew not what, until, convinced they were not being followed, they pulled up, panting.

"Santa Maria!" groaned the smuggler, "into what trap have we fallen?"

"It is that accursed Groby!" hissed Reonardo. "He must have suspected that I intended to play him false, and has thus avenged himself. But he missed his chief quarry in myself."

"But he is only one, and there appeared to me to be many guns."

"Five or six at the outside, and there are many men engaged in the school who would be at his service. The dog! The villain! It shall go hard with me if I do not bitterly avenge this day's work."

Reonardo wiped the perspiration from his brow, and muttering to himself, took the backward route to the cave. The smuggler followed at his heels, miserably brooding.

CHAPTER LX.

MR. GROBY IS EXASPERATED.



"BOYS," said Jim, as he drew back from the window, "it is a horrible thing to be obliged to slay these men, but there was no help for it."

"None," echoed Morse, solemnly. "The pity of it is that two have got away."

He thrust his head out by the lattice, which was open, and quietly surveyed the men lying below.

Two, of course, were barely visible in the water of the moat, but they could just be seen, lying still under the surface of the pellucid water. The other three lay upon the ground motionless.

"They will not trouble us again," he said, as he drew back; "but the question arises, what will Reonardo, who seems to have escaped, do for the purpose of revenge?"

"What can he do?" asked Morse.

"He has other men at his command."

"Ah! Then he had better keep them from here. I will away into the cave again, where he will probably promptly return, and hear what he has to say."

"Are you not running a great risk, Morse?"

"None in the least. If discovered, they would not be able to follow me far. I am prepared, Jim, with all the necessary materials for self-defence."

He touched his pocket lightly but significantly, and led the way below. On the road thither, Terry asked Jim what he was going to do concerning Eveline.

"Nothing," was the reply. "She will come here with Groby, who, not meeting with his confederates, will be helpless. He will wait and wait in vain for them, and retire defeated. In the evening, when Romeo comes, I will send back a letter to her, explaining everything that has happened."

Jim rightly gauged the situation. Mr Groby, without the men he expected, was helpless.

Owing to the rifles having been fired off at the back of the castle, the report was not heard below, or, at least, as far as the vicinity of the schoolhouse.

Mr. Groby, unsuspecting what had happened, was out early after dinner, awaiting Eveline and her mother.

He sauntered into the post-office, and was gratified by shortly seeing Mr. Storeby and Mr. Turner come out together and walk down to the beach, where they took a boat and pulled up the lagoon.

A number of the boys also emerged from the house, and scattered in various directions, but none took the path to the castle.

Last of all came Eveline and Mrs. Farrell, the former bearing her sketching materials, and the latter burdened with two small camp-stools.

Mr. Groby hastened forward to tender his services as light porter. Eveline refused his services, but Mrs. Farrell handed him the camp-stools, and they set out together.

Now that what he believed to be the supreme hour of his fate was approaching, Mr. Groby found it difficult to keep his usual cool bearing. In spite of his efforts he could not help his breath coming in short, quick gasps, inasmuch that Mrs. Farrell thought they were ascending the path too quickly.

"Eveline, dear," she said, "Mr. Groby is not so young and active as you are. Travel a little slower, my dear."

Eveline made no answer. The convenience of Mr. Groby was about the last thing she would trouble herself about. She increased her pace, if anything, and forged ahead. Suddenly it flashed on the master that the best thing he could do would be to let her go on alone. She would then, as he believed, fall an easy prey to Reonardo, and when missed, he would not be implicated.

There would be no need then to secure Mrs. Farrell.

This lady was keeping him company, and bewailing the wilfulness of Eveline, who was "spoilt by her father, a deserter from the island."

Mrs. Farrell, of late, spoke of her husband as if he had deserted from the army.

So she lingered with the master, and Eveline vanished out of sight.

Panting and puffing, Mr. Groby halted at intervals by the way, apologising to Mrs. Farrell for his lack of speed, which he declared arose from his having been recently indisposed.

"But we shall not be far behind Miss Farrell," he said. "I know the spot she has selected to sketch from."

"Mr. Groby," said Mrs. Farrell, "can you tell me what has become of Gordon, Morse, and others of the boys that are missing?"

"They are playing the gipsy somewhere," he replied. "The lax hand Mr. Farrell had over the boys was very injurious to discipline. But in resuming our duties next term, that will be remedied."

"Napoleon was too easy," said Mrs. Farrell, "but he was a great organiser."

"Undoubtedly he had that gift," was the dry response; "especially when assisted by tourist agents. However, he is gone, and until he returns or writes, I shall consider it my duty to do all I can for you."

"Mr. Groby," said Mrs. Farrell, casting a shy upward glance at him, "I am sure you are a true friend. And sometimes I feel that you aspire to be something more."

"I do indeed," he said.

"Unhappily, I am not yet free," sighed Mrs. Farrell, "so we must not get foolish with each other."

"Certainly not," hastily responded Mr. Groby, aghast to find what sort of friend she wished him to be. "Shall we hasten on? Eveline—may I call her Eveline?"

"Surely; she is only a girl," replied Mrs. Farrell.

"Eveline will by this time have settled to her work," continued Mr. Groby. "Yonder, just beyond that clump of trees, is the plateau where she will sketch from."

He was all ears, listening for some sound or sign of commotion, but could hear nothing, and he was puzzled.

"But perhaps they have done their work swiftly and silently," he mused. "If so, all the better."

As he drew nearer the plateau, which was not more than twenty feet square, the silence was profound. It appeared that Eveline was no longer there, or within hail.

And so it proved to be. The plateau was empty.

Not the slightest vestige of Eveline or her belongings could be seen.

"This is the place," said Mr. Groby, assuming a bewildered look. "Surely Eveline has not been mad enough to go on to the castle. If so," he added, in a tone of alarm, "she runs the risk of falling in with one of the bears that have recently made it their lair."

"Oh, Mr. Groby!" exclaimed Mrs. Farrell, "you do not mean to say that the story of the bears there is true?"

"It is indeed. I have personally encountered them, and suffered material injury."

"My poor child!" cried Mrs. Farrell, wringing her hands. "Mr. Groby, will you go to her help?"

"Well, really, my dear madam," he began, really alarmed now on his own account, "I—I——"

"I will go if you do not," pursued Mrs. Farrell, "for I am a mother above all things."

She began her journey upward, and he, for very shame, perforce followed her. But not for any great distance.

A few yards up the path there was a turning, and, as they reached it, Charley, the bear, was seen leisurely coming down.

Mrs. Farrell screamed, and, fainting in right earnest she fell into the arms of Mr. Groby, whose very hair bristled with natural alarm.

Muttering anathemas on the head of his burden, he hastened down, dragging her with him. Charley leisurely followed until the plateau was reached, and there the intelligent animal stopped and exhibited his vast proportions by rising on his hind legs.

Mr. Groby, remembering his former encounter with the beast, hastened downward until a glance backward showed that he was no longer being pursued.

Then, out of breath and all round pretty well exhausted, he stopped, and restored Mrs. Farrell to consciousness by shaking her.

It took some time to make her aware of the position of affairs as viewed by Mr. Groby. He had not the least doubt that Eveline had fallen a victim to the bear.

It was very bitter news for the mother, who, with all her petty faults, loved her child, and felt the loss of her more keenly than she did the desertion of the redoubtable Napoleon.

Sobbing, she was assisted home by Mr. Groby, who, having seen her safe, set out at once for the chine.

CHAPTER LXI.

WHEN ROGUE MEETS ROGUE!



R. Groby was thoroughly imbued with the belief that he had been deceived by Espardo Reonardo, who never intended to keep his word, and in going to the chine, he was bent on reproaching him for his lack of honesty.

On the other hand, Reonardo conceived that the master had played him a trick in consequence of his having discovered that he was to be the victim of treachery.

It did not matter a straw to the Spaniard that in the matter he was the originator of double-dealing. It was sufficient for him that he had up to the present come off second best. Therefore would he have revenge.

For the time he felt he must give up all hope of carrying out his intention regarding Eveline. After the loss of so many men, it would not be safe for him to remain on the island.

His better course therefore would be to leave it for the time, return to Minorca, and there having secured recruits, he could again come to Fermentera and carry out his revengeful purpose.

That was the decision he came to, and on his return to the cave he summoned Vampa and the remainder of the men, and told them all that had happened, and his views on the course to take.

The wrath of the smugglers was expressed in many oaths and much grinding of teeth. They, too, vowed to have revenge, but agreed to bide their time, as their leader advocated.

The non-arrival of Giuseppe across the island puzzled them, but Reonardo said that Giuseppe must look after himself, and one of the boats could be left behind for his use.

Then came the question of the two prisoners, Napoleon Farrell and Chorker.

The latter, according to his own belief, was a member of the band, and he was considerably astonished when he was summoned with his prisoner, and told that he was about to be sentenced to die.

His astonishment was followed by terror, and, with the schoolmaster, he fell upon his knees and implored that his life might be spared.

"So shall it be," said Reonardo, grimly, and exchanged a few words in a whisper with Vampa.

After that the arms of Chorker were bound, and he and Mr. Farrell were led down the cave, far away from the mouth of it, where their legs were also secured.

"Your lives are spared," said Reonardo, "and you will live as long as you are able—*without food or water*. Adios, my friends."

He left them, and, with his men, vanished into the open air. Mr. Farrell groaned, and seemed to be in a state of utter collapse. Chorker's feelings found vent in a bellow that was as the roar of a bull.

Still, he was alive, and drew some consolation from the fact, although it was a very poor amount.

Leaving them there, let us follow Reonardo to Silver Bay, where, as his men prepared the boat for sea, he paced up and down, yielding himself to exasperating thoughts.

It was while he was thus engaged that he saw Mr. Groby approaching, and without reflecting on the folly of his coming, provided he had acted as Reonardo believed he had done, the Spaniard loosened his knife in its leathern sheath, and hastened towards him.

"Here, you," he said, between his teeth, "I ask how it is that you have slain my men? Have you come here to mock me?"

"I know nothing of your men," replied Mr. Groby. "All I know is that you failed to come as you promised, and the girl is dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes; destroyed by a bear that is in hiding in the castle. I took her to the appointed place——"

"It is a lie!" cried Reonardo. "I see it all. Not content with having killed my noble followers, you hatch a lie to deceive me, who escaped by a miracle from the rifles of the men you had in ambush."

"In ambush?" exclaimed the bewildered schoolmaster.

"Yes, in ambush," repeated Reonardo. "You intended to kill us all, knowing that it was my intention to espouse the girl myself——"

"Ha!" exclaimed Mr. Groby, with a new light breaking in upon him; "you intended to play me false?"

"I did," replied Reonardo, defiantly, "so there's an end of that. Failing to kill me you think, to hide your villainy with a lie. A bear in the castle! Pooh! Rubbish! Away with you for a liar. You think that believing the girl to be dead I go away, but only to return when I will. And you think that I will leave my bride in your care?"

"You talk idle nonsense, Reonardo!"

"And you, Groby, talk as a fool. No, I shall not leave her to you. This for your treachery—and this for the ambush—and this, and this, and *this* for the lives of my men!"

He had sprung upon the master, taking him by surprise, and dealt him four or five blows with the knife. The victim of this sudden attack staggered back, threw up his arms, and fell heavily upon the sands, with the blood flowing freely from his wounds.

"Villain," he gasped, "you have murdered me!"

"Had I done less," replied Reonardo, coolly, "I should not be what I am—a Spaniard. Lie there and die, you dog!"

The wounded man sought to make some rejoinder, but his strength was going fast, and he was unable to do so. Sinking down upon his back, his breast heaved once, and then he was still. Reonardo bent down and looked at him for a moment. A smile of evil satisfaction passed over his face.

"I have settled accounts with him," he said, and hearing the men calling out that the boat was ready for sea, he hastened towards them.

Shortly after the sails of the smuggler-boat were filled with the breeze, and Reonardo was, for the time at least, borne away from the island he had had harassed so sorely.

CHAPTER LXII.

CHORKER AND MR. NAPOLEON FARRELL.



ALTHOUGH it would have appeared to be pitch dark in the cave to anyone coming from the outer air, there was, nevertheless, some light that filtered down to where the two bound men were lying.

It was just enough for them to see each other, and they took advantage of their individual helplessness to very freely express their feelings.

"Chorker," said Mr. Farrell, "you are a mean skunk of a fellow, and you are rightly served for your treachery to me."

"What do you mean by treachery?" asked Chorker.

"You curried favour with those scoundrels by seeking to join them, and thought they had accepted you when they allowed you to play dog in watching over me."

"Oh, that's how you look at it?"

"Yes," replied the schoolmaster.

"Whatsoever I may be," said Chorker, "I'm not a mean worm who, to save his own skin, ran away from his wife and daughter."

"I didn't run away!" violently asserted Mr. Farrell.

"There's one general opinion on that point, I'll swear," said Chorker, "right through the school, and it isn't yours. If you should have the luck of getting out of this hobble, you can never show your face there again."

"We shall not get out of it," groaned the schoolmaster.

"I'm afeard not," moaned Chorker.

And then their minds reverting to their position, they whined in concert.

"I think, Chorker," said Mr. Farrell, after a time, "that we, being doomed men, have no right to entertain animosity towards each other."

"Perhaps it will be best to forgive all that's passed," said Chorker, doubtfully. "I should like to do it if I thought it would help a poor sinful man like me, anyways."

"We are all sinners!"

"We are," said Chorker.

And again they groaned in company.

Their expressions of mental anguish were cut short by a curious sound, apparently coming from the interior of the cave beyond where they were lying.

It was something between a growl and a laugh, and Chorker, ceasing to wail, listened with every hair of his head stiffened by terror.

Mr. Farrell hearing it, too, also became silent. The sound ceased.

"Did you-u-u-u hear anything, Chorker?" asked the schoolmaster.

"I di-i-id," replied Chorker.

"A sort of unearthly groan?"

"It were, sir."

Chorker was as humble as he could be now.

"It seemed to me a most unnatural sound, Chorker."

"I've heerd of sperrits being seen in caves. Mercy on us! There it is again!"

The sound was certainly enough to terrify two men of their nature and in their position. If ever a ghost wailed, it never did the trick in a more effective manner. This time the sound was followed by a sharp crack, like the report of a toy rifle.

"Dern it, what's that?" asked the bewildered Chorker.

"What a peculiar aroma!" exclaimed Farrell.

There was indeed a peculiar aroma in the cave. It was not unpleasant, but at the same time it had a weakening effect on those who inhaled it. Mr. Farrell immediately began to feel the influence.

Chorker sniffed twice, and shut eyes tightly.

"It ain't sulphur," he said, "but that sort of stuff may be going out of fashion with ghosts. Mr. Farrell, we are two sinful men."

"We are!" asserted the schoolmaster, energetically.

"But our sins ain't ekal to some as is done by other pussons, and we may hope to be forgiven."

"Amen!"

"Mr. Farrell, I feels like going to sleep."

"A state of—of—of dreaminess is coming over me, Chorker. Good-bye."

"Go-o-od-bye, sir. Bless you for a man as meant well by me, if you didn't quite come up to what I had a right to expect."

"I should—should—like my—wife and darling Evevine—to—be—here—but——"

The schoolmaster was gone. To him the world was a blank. Chorker, being of a harder nature, still battled with the influence of the deadly aroma.

"Whatsoever *my* faults," he murmured, "I—didn't leave my wife—and child—'cause—I was—afraid. *No!*—I'm a poor sinful creatur—I might ha' done—better as a man—and not been—sich—a liar——"

And then he in his turn yielded to the influence of the subtle vapour, and lay still.

Why should we make a secret of the cause of all this? It was Morse who worked the whole thing.

He had been on the watch all the afternoon, taking note of events occurring in the cave, and finally, acting on his own judgment, he tested the value of his latest invention by reducing the schoolmaster and Chorker to a state of insensibility.

It will be remembered by the reader that he had this compound in its preliminary stage when he first visited the cave alone. Since then he had finished the manufacture of it, and the result was completely satisfactory.

Keeping out of the sphere of its influence, he gave it time to allow for the evaporation of its power, and then crept up to the two victims he had experimented upon.

They were wrapt in a peculiarly heavy slumber, and snoring like a pair of grampuses.

Morse, with an amused smile upon his face, calmly cut their bonds and left them.

Some hours later Chorker awoke from his state of lethargy, and sat up. He felt a little weary about the brow, but otherwise his head was in thinking order.

"Mr. Farrell," he said.

"What is it, and who are you?" asked a feeble voice.

"It's me—Chorker. I've lost the ropes as was about me."

"And I am free, too, Chorker. What does it mean?"

"Sperrits!" answered Chorker, solemnly. "Interventions of a supernatural order to help two poor creeters as was unjustly in trouble."

"It is horribly dark, Chorker," said the schoolmaster. "Which is the way out?"

"Give me your hand, sir," said Chorker. "I'll help you along to the best of my ability. It is a wonderful intervention we've had. As a sinful man I don't think I deserve it."

"If we got all we deserved, Chorker, who would escape whipping?"

"Werry true, sir."

To admit the truth, the pair of them were in a state of bewildered humility, not knowing what to make of their strange release from captivity, and both were inclined to put it down to supernatural involuntary aid.

Hand in hand the precious pair groped their way to the mouth of the cave, where they found the chine flooded with moonlight.

What the hour was neither could tell. Chorker, having made a mental calculation of the time the moon ought to rise, was of opinion that it was about two in the morning, and it says much for his knowledge of such matters, when it is known that he was only three hours out.

As a matter of fact, it was nearly five o'clock, and the dawn was nigh.

Both men felt very sick and faint, having been so long without food, and it became the question between them as to what was to be done.

"I," said Mr. Farrell, "will return home and resume my position at the head of my establishment."

"Then all I can say is," replied Chorker, "that you've got a cheek specially your own. I can go back, not having done no more than obey orders from a man who puts himself up as my superior——"

"Chorker, *I am* your superior."

"Putting aside that p'int for the future," said Chorker, "I'll give you a bit of friendly advice. *Don't go home.*"

"Why not?"

"For werry shame keep away until I've kind o' helped things to blow over. Suppose you stop in the cave——"

"I'll risk anything—endure anything, Chorker, rather than stay another hour in that accursed place. It is clear to me that those scoundrels have left the island, and I'm again master here. Whatever I have done I'm answerable to nobody but myself for it, and I shall resume my position. You will please fall back to the place of a dependent."

"All right, brother sinner," said Chorker, drily, "only don't come it too stiff with me, or——"

Mr. Farrell was already hastening down the slope to the bottom of the chine, and arriving there, he stalked towards the beach.

They turned out of the mouth of the chine, master and man, a few feet apart, and sulkily silent.

Outside moonlight lit up the sands, and there, to the horror of the schoolmaster, he beheld the figure of a man crawling slowly along on all-fours, and stopping every pace or so to groan.

No wonder Mr. Farrell staggered back and seized Chorker by the arm, while that fraudulent mariner in his turn was utterly flabbergasted.

"Chorker, what new horror is this?"

"It's a spectre!"

Their voices reached the ear of the crawling man. He stopped, and with an effort turned his face towards them.

"Whoever you are," he groaned, "help a wounded man on the verge of dying."

It was Mr. Groby, not dead, but injured sorely, and likely enough, without prompt aid, to die.

It was Chorker who recognised his voice, and, after a long stare, knew the figure also. He called to the master by name, and asked him what was the matter.

"I am stabbed in half a dozen places," was the feeble answer. "Who is it?"

"Chorker and Mr. Farrell."

"Come to my help. Assist me home."

They could do nothing less, although there were reasons why they should not be so friendly together. Nevertheless they could not leave the wounded man to die, and having assisted him to his feet, each took an arm, and thus the three most unworthy men in the school crawled back to its sheltering roof together.

But it took time, and daylight had arrived when Mr. Farrell, in an authoritative way, knocked at the door.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE WELCOME HOME.



ABE us! exclaimed Romeo, "who dat at de door at dis hour ob de mornin'?"

Macbeth and Hamlet, equally startled by the authoritative nature of the summons, stared at Romeo without making any reply.

"It not Massa Gordon

come back, I suppose," pursued Romeo.

Rat—tat—tat!

"Here it am agen," said Romeo, "and me being all black wif cleanin' up de grate. Me not fit to answer de door."

"It am you duty," said Macbeth, "and derefore you do it on de spot. What do people 'spect at dis time in de mornin'? Moreober, who see de black on you nigger paws?"

"You more 'sponsible for me being a nigger dan I am myself. But as it seem dat neider ob you got de courage to answer de door, *me do it for you.*"

Taking the poker with him as a precaution against a sudden attack from a possible foe, Romeo went to the front door, and kneeling down, put his eye to the keyhole.

As he did so a third summons was peremptorily rattled on the door.

"Who dere?" asked Romeo through the keyhole.

"Open the door!" roared Mr. Farrell, without.

His voice was hoarse and cracked, and Romeo failed to recognise it.

"You jes' gib a name," he said, "and you word ob honour dat dere am no trick in it. Who am you?"

"Mr. Farrell."

"Jehominy and butterscotch!" exclaimed Romeo, and without any further hesitation he opened the door.

At first Romeo saw the schoolmaster only, looking none the better in form, feature, or apparel for his recent adventure. The nigger knew all about the way the schoolmaster had skulked off, and was prepared to treat him accordingly.

"So you come back?" he said. "Well, if me was you, me not show my face to de missus."

"How dare you talk in that way?" demanded the schoolmaster.

"What sort ob way you have me talk?" asked Romeo; "when all t'rough you Miss Eveline eaten by a bear, and missus been in husterisks almost t'rough de night."

Romeo now perceived Chorker and Mr. Groby, and his eyes came well out of his head.

"What am de marrer wif Massa Groby?"

"Assist him to his room," said Mr. Farrell, "and I will ask Mrs. Farrell to supply some ointment for his wounds."

Romeo was helped in his task by his father and grandfather, who had been listening to the colloquy that took place at the door. Chorker, pleading hunger, wended his way to the kitchen, and from thence to the larder, where he ate his fill, and then sought his own room with the idea of utilising the next few hours in getting what he had not lately enjoyed—a comfortable sleep.

Mr. Farrell crept upstairs to his chamber, where he found his wife sitting by a table, wrapped in moody meditation. She had not undressed all night, and had only succeeded in getting a few snatches of sleep in her chair.

Startled by the opening of the door, she looked round and saw her husband. Instantly her face became that of a frozen woman.

"My dear," he said, with a miserable assumption of cheerfulness, "I have returned."

"Indeed?" she said; "and why?"

It was a question that completely floored him. He stopped short on the way to an intended embrace, and shuffled uneasily on his feet.

"I have returned," he said, "because—I have a right to—I suppose."

"No," she said, "you left us—deserted us in a most cowardly way. And where is your sense of shame that you show your face here again? I was always very submissive to you, and believed in you—

until I found you out. Now, Napoleon Farrell, learn this—I despise you!”

The shock was a terrific one. The complete facing about of his wife—the sudden and unexpected development in her character—was a stunning blow to him.

He stood still while she reproached him for all her recent troubles, among which she placed the loss of Eveline, whom she had not set eyes on since the afternoon.

“You are a cur, Napoleon Farrell!” she said, as a wind-up. “Go and hide your face from all here, and, above all, from me!”

He wheeled about, and, as one in a state of semi-blindness, groped his way from the room. As he turned into the corridor he saw Eveline coming up the stairs.

She beheld him at the same moment, and their surprise was mutual.

“Eveline,” said the schoolmaster, huskily, “your mother has just told me you were dead.”

“I have come back home unharmed,” replied the girl. “Indeed, I might have returned before, but for something that happened in the castle.”

“You have been there?”

“Where is mother?” asked Eveline. “I can explain everything to her.”

“My child,” said Mr. Farrell, “can you not forgive me? I loved you once, and I love you still. It is true I did a wrong thing, but it is not for you to condemn me.”

She lifted up her face to him and he kissed her. Then she drew aside, and again asked where her mother was. He pointed towards the door of the room.

“She will have nothing to do with me,” he said, huskily; “try and make peace between us.”

“I will do what I can,” said Eveline, and left him alone.

With the step of an old man he crawled down the stairs, and, yielding to the needs of the time, sought one of the negroes to obtain food. It was Macbeth he first met, and made his wants known to him.

“Me bring you sumfin’,” said Macbeth, “but you not deserve it. Dat ’ere Massa Groby bery bad. He want a doctor, surely.”

“And there is none here,” said Mr. Farrell. “Give me something to eat, and I will see what I can do for him.”

CHAPTER LXIV.

JIM GORDON RETURNS.



WHATEVER may have been the nature of the communication Eveline made to her mother, it was entirely satisfactory. But she could not at once bring about the peace desired by her father—between him and his offended wife.

“Not yet,” she said. “I have some stipulations to make with him first.”

Hearing of the condition of Mr. Groby, she went to his room, and found Romeo in attendance. The negro, with rare and unexpected skill, had washed his wounds and bound them up. But the condition of the injured man was perilous.

“Where did you get your wounds?” asked Mrs. Farrell, quietly.

Mr. Groby looked at her miserably, and shook his head.

“I would rather not say,” he replied.

“For the present, then, we will let the matter rest,” rejoined Mrs. Farrell. “But it seems to me that there is something very mysterious in the whole affair. It will, of course, be explained satisfactorily by-and-by.”

She left him, and gave orders that he was to have whatever he required and the house commanded, but she did not go near him again.

Romeo was his attendant, giving him all the time he could spare, and he played his part of nurse extremely well.

Meanwhile, in the latter part of the day, when the boys were playing about outside, and the men conversing on [the strange events up to the time that ended in the schoolmaster's return, Lal Brodie, casting his eye in the direction of the castle-path, saw Jim Gordon walking towards him with his free, swinging stride.

The youngster immediately set up a great shout, and drew every eye upon him.

“Jim is coming!” he shouted, pointing in the direction of the popular individual he named.

Espying him, both boys and men rushed forward to give him greeting.

“Now, have some mercy on a fellow,” he said, as they pressed round him; “I am only here for a short time. I hear that Mr. Farrell has returned?”

“Yes, old Nap, the duffer, has turned up again!” shouted a score of voices.

Nap, the “duffer,” happened at that moment to emerge from the house and hear himself thus referred

to in a most uncomplimentary manner. A dark frown settled on his face as he strode up to the noisy group. Instantly seen, his presence brought about a temporary lull in the riot.

"Duffer or not," he said, "I am *master* here. Please to remember *that*!"

"More's the pity," said a man's voice in the thick of the crowd.

"Who said that?" demanded the schoolmaster.

"I did," replied Martin, striding forward, "and I meant it. Thanks to you we are all here—boxed up on an island, and mixed up in all sorts of *feuds* with which we have nothing to do."

"Martin," said Mr. Farrell, "you will consider yourself under notice to leave."

"Certainly," replied Martin, briskly. "And I shall be glad to go, with many more, *as soon as we can get away*. You took the launch from the island. What have you done with her?"

"She is at the bottom of the sea."

"Where she might expect to go in your hands."

It was Changeling now having a shot, and the schoolmaster turned towards him like a goaded animal.

"You can have notice, too," he said.

"Give it to us all in a lump," said Waffle, "and finish the job."

Mr. Farrell wheeled about and faced Jim.

"Where have you been since I landed you on the island?" he asked.

"In the castle," answered Jim, "where I was compelled to go by the tyranny of the man who usurped your place."

"All through," returned the schoolmaster, "you have been supporting insubordination, for which you will be *expelled*."

"That's a change from giving notice," said Martin. "You expelled yourself, sir; and why did you not stay away?"

"Ahem," coughed the schoolmaster. "That is a question you have no right to ask, and one which I shall assuredly not answer."

"I came down," said Jim, breaking in and giving his friends a warning glance, "knowing you had returned, to make terms for the coming back of myself and others to the school. Also to arrange for the reception of a stranger."

"I'll have no strangers here," said Mr. Farrell.

Again there was an addition to the crowd in the person of Eveline. She came up to her father and touched him lightly on the arm.

"Mamma," she said, "wishes to speak to you."

The face of the man was a study as he struggled with his rage and petty pride, and finally yielded to the exigencies of the position.

"I will come in a minute," he said.

"You must come now, or not at all," insisted Eveline, speaking in a low tone as before.

"Very well," he said, with a stifled groan. "I am but a shuttlecock here, knocked about by every battle-dore. Gordon, you had better wait."

"He is to come, too," said Eveline. "Mamma saw him from the window, and she desires it."

Again there was a struggle in the breast of the schoolmaster, but he yielded, as he was bound by his weak nature to do, whether in the right or wrong.

"So be it," he said, and with a quick, jerky step, expressive of his inward feelings, he led the way into the house.

Jim and Eveline followed, exchanging a few words in an undertone. The rest looked dumbly on, not knowing what to make of it all.

CHAPTER LXV.

MR. FARRELL CAVES IN COMPLETELY.



RS. Farrell received them in Eveline's boudoir, and on entering she gave Jim her hand. To her husband she said:

"Sit down, Nap, and hear what I have to say, then decide on what course you will take."

The schoolmaster sat down and passed his hand across his brow. Mrs. Farrell motioned to Jim to take a seat also, and Eveline took up a position, standing by the side of her mother.

"Nap," said Mrs. Farrell, "I have a most extraordinary story to tell, and not the least extraordinary feature about it is that it's absolutely true. You are aware that there was a plot, on the part of a man named Reonardo, to carry off Eveline?"

"I was aware of it, my dear," was the humble reply.

"But you were not aware, perhaps, that it has been supplemented by another in which Mr. Groby shares?"

"Assuredly not. I had no idea of Groby plotting anything."

"But he has done so," said Mrs. Farrell.

And then she proceeded to give him the particulars of many things already known to the reader. The only thing withheld from him was the work done by Morse and the way it was done. Not a word was said about the trap-door in the laboratory of that investigating young gentleman.

The part of the narrative relating to the ambush laid for the smugglers by the boys, with the result, fairly staggered the schoolmaster.

"But how did they know these men were coming?" he asked.

"That," said Mrs. Farrell, "is their secret, and if they desire to reveal it to you, they can do so. It is not in my power to tell you more than I have done, and I stipulate that all the boys be received back with a full recognition of their meritorious services, and that the bear, which they have acquired during their marvellous adventures in the wood and on the other side of the island, be also made part of our household. It will not be necessary nor desirous that it should actually live in the house, but it must be provided even as we would for a faithful dog."

"I will be responsible for its good conduct," said Jim.

"Last night," said Eveline, "I passed the time in the castle in a room the boys prepared for me, and Charley, the bear, slept all night by the door. He seemed to appoint himself as a friend and protector, although, of course, I needed none, being with my truest friends here."

Mr. Farrell looked helplessly from one to the other. He was nonplussed throughout, and all he could do was to yield.

"What I have heard," he said, with a preliminary cough, "naturally places the conduct of Gordon and his especial friends in a new light. I am willing to overlook every breach of discipline for the sake of—ahem—my wife and daughter. My dear, I trust you have no further humiliation in store for me?"

"None," she replied, quietly; "and if you will only look at things in their true light, Nap, you will recognise that the humiliations you have endured have originated in yourself alone. Gordon, you can return to your friends and ask them to come here without delay."

Jim rose and bowed, and casting a pleased glance in the direction of Eveline, disappeared.

"Nap," said Mrs. Farrell, after a short silence, "recent events ought to teach us all a lesson which I trust you will especially profit by."

"I wish I had been throttled at my birth!" exclaimed the schoolmaster. "It would have been better than experiencing the miseries which have fallen to my lot."

"Meet the difficulties of the wretched business like a man," said Mrs. Farrell, "and all may yet be well. I shall certainly endeavour to meet them as a woman. You have disillusioned me as regards yourself, but that I may one day forget. It will be done only by you. Nap, come here."

He crossed over to him, and she took his face between her hands.

"Nap," she said, "I took you for better or worse, and although you have not proved to be all I believed, I willet bygones be bygones."

Then she kissed him, and he responded briskly to the salute.

After that Eveline embraced her father, and so far all was well.

"What is to be done about Groby?" he asked.

"We cannot condemn him unheard," answered Mrs. Farrell. "Every man has a right to reply to a charge before he is condemned. If he is well enough, we will ask him what he has to say in defence. Meanwhile, of course, he must not be harassed. It would be unjust, for, I believe, the life of the man hangs upon a thread."

Jim must have been well assured of his request to return and live unmolested with all his companions in adventure, for they were awaiting him not far from the level ground, and, prior to summoning them, he let the fact of their immediate return be known.

It caused quite a furore in the school, and when at length, just before darkness set in, he appeared with Charley, walking with measured tread by his side, and the other adventurers behind, there was a wild hurrah by way of welcome.

Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo came tearing out of the house, and the last named was received by Charley with open arms, or, to be more correct, with open paws.

It was such a scene as had not been witnessed at the school before, nor, indeed, anything, in a novel sense, approaching it.

Charley gave a brief performance of some of his tricks prior to being led away to the woodshed which was to be his temporary home. On the morrow Jim proposed starting building one for his future residence, and there was no lack of volunteers to help with the job.

Of course everybody wanted to know everything, and they were told as much as was necessary or good for them to know. And they were satisfied.

Chorker, holding back from the general congratulations, wondered about many things, recalling the time when the boys had rescued him from the cave.

It had always been a mystery to him how they got there, and in a dim way he saw there was some sort of connection with it and the mysterious release of himself and the schoolmaster from captivity.

Still, he could not imagine the truth, and he could not ask questions of anyone or go into it at all, but just take things as he found them, and make the best of matters inexplicable.

There were "sounds of revelry" in the schoolhouse that night, and the murmurs of voices penetrated to the sick and wounded man. He asked Romeo what they meant.

"Massa Gordon come back," replied Romeo, "with all de oder boys, and dey bring a tame bear wif dem dat dey foun' in de forest."

"A tame bear!" echoed Mr. Groby.

"Dat 'so," said Romeo. "Me wif de boys when dey foun' him, and he mighty big fun."

"But this bear," said Mr. Groby, speaking painfully and slowly, "would be very violent to a stranger."

"Pends on de stranger, sar," said Romeo, innocently. "A short time ago a pusson come up to de castle, and Charley—dat de bear, sar—gib him a pat ober de head dat make him unconkshus. Massa Gordon see him do it, and larf fit to lust. But, bless you, Charley was not 'lowed to do more."

"Who stopped him?"

"Why, Massa Gordon, ob course. Charley uncommon fond ob Miss Eveline, which show him good sense."

"Miss Eveline," muttered the master. "When did she see this animal?"

"'Bout an hour ago, for de larse time to-night. She bring him somfin to eat, and he larf all ober him face, like a Christian genelman. He 'bout de mose knowin' of all de bears dat eberseen in dis subflunary world."

"I understood that Miss Eveline—was——"

"Bless yer, no, sir; she all right. She was wif de boys a lilly while, and dey take care ob her like de genelman dey am. You make you mind easy 'bout dat, sir. She all right."

"All right with her and all wrong with me," thought Mr. Groby, as he sank back with a groan.

CHAPTER LXVI.

A LULL IN THE STORM OF EVENTS.



"CHORKER," said Changeling, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and proceeded to refill, "don't yer feel unkimmon small?"

"Wot for?" growled Chorker.

"Well, seeing as you jined the enemy in the shape of Nap, and went

with him to make an ass of yourself by losing my launch, I thinks as you ought to feel it."

"Your launch?"

"Yes, mine, and if you says it wasn't I'll punch your hoary head. Didn't I look arter her, and if you was in my place, wouldn't you speak of her as *your* boat?"

They were sitting by the sea on the side of one of the small rowing-craft stranded on the sands, and they were alone; for it was as yet very early in the

morning, too early for any of the ordinary members of the household to be abroad.

"Well, your launch, if you like," muttered Chorker. "It don't matter a fig now who claims her, seeing where she is."

"You are a pair of images," said Changeling, derisively. "What put it into yer addled heads to think as you could go to sea without somebody to take care of you?"

"We went," snapped Chorker, "and that was enough."

"More'n enough," remarked Changeling; "mighty close friends you must be with the master to chum up together that way. But I fancy ye've had a kind o' disserlution of partnership, ain't yer?"

"I don't know," snarled Chorker.

"But I do," said Changeling. "Master sent you a message last night."

"By who?"

"Me—me, Changeling, late of the late 'Dart' launch. He comes to me and he says, 'You tell that 'ere Chorker not to let me see sight of his face agen, and he ain't to hang anywheres about the premises. If he do I shall outlaw him, so that anybody may shoot him or chuck him into the sea.'"

"You are a-joking, Changeling," said Chorker.

"I ain't," was the firm reply; "and wot is more, the words of the master have been ginerally redorsed by all in the place. You've got to go, and I'm here early this morning to tell you so. Take my advice, and don't be here when the boys come out, or you may rue it. That's friendly."

"But what am I do?" asked the staggered Chorker.

"Go up the chine and live like a hermit," advised Changeling. "Master won't mind yer having a bit o' wittles. All he wants is not to set eyes on yer highly-coloured countenance. He says as you jined that murderous lot and was set over him, and that you worried him like a dog."

Chorker scratched his head, staring lugubriously at the sea.

"Perhaps he didn't mean it?" he said.

"I should think he did," answered Changeling. "He looked to me like a man who had had a towelling himself, and wanted to give it on to another. You'll have to go, not being a favourite, anyways. He said as you could sartainly live in one part of the house, if you liked."

"Where was that?"

"With Charley, the bear."

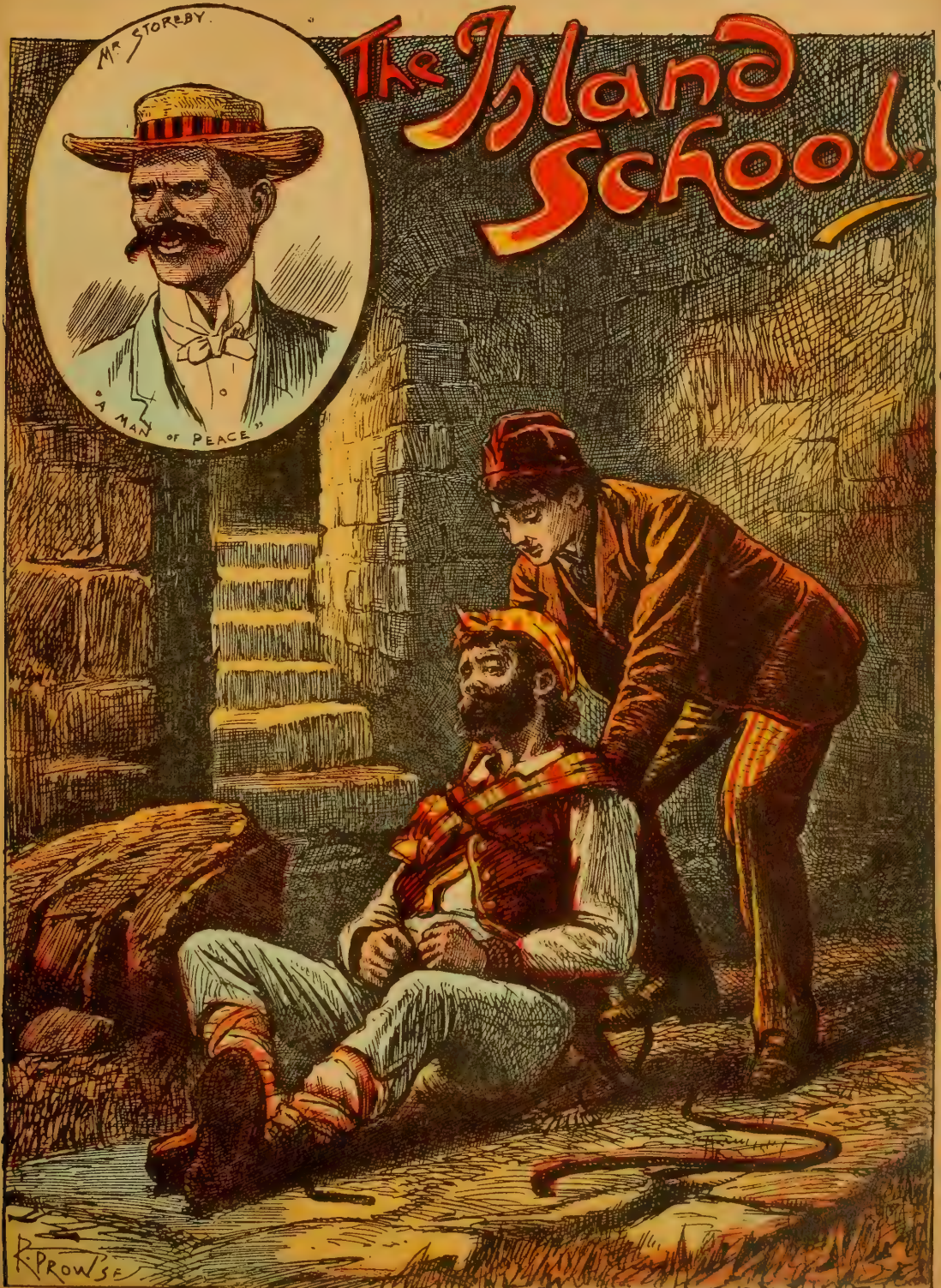
Chorker grinned in a ghastly manner.

"I'd like to see him put with it," he said; "I reckon he'd be made pulp on."

"Get your things together, and cut it," said Changeling. "Ivery day I'll bring you something to eat, and maybe a bit o' 'bacca, and leave 'em at the

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



After dragging him into the castle, Morse saw that his bonds were secure, before taking his prisoner in. "Spare my life," said Giuseppe, humbly.

mouth of the chine. There's a big flat stone with a bit of a holler under it. I'll make that your cupboard."

"A chap can't live in the chine."

"A chap's got to live in the chine if he ain't got nowhere else to put his head in; which 'minds me that Mr. Farrell says as you was to live in the chine and in that 'ere cave. If you put up anywheres else, he's have you shot as a traitor."

"They durstn't do it."

"They'd do it whether they durst or not, for, as I said afore, you ain't no favourite, and all the flowers at your funeral could be put in a thimble, and then not blossom over. Go along, old man. In half an hour the youngsters will be out, and I understood as the bear was to be brought out, too."

"I'll go," groaned Chorker, "but it's rough on an old man who's sarved his country and his master well."

"You jined the enemy?"

"Only to look more kindly after master. But there ain't no gratitude in men, and so I chucks it up. You won't forget the wittles and the 'bacca?"

"No, and a rug or two to make a bed of. Though you sank *my* launch, I'll act friendly with you and on the square."

It was barely ten minutes later when Chorker went pegging away with all speed in the direction of the chine. In the house he had heard the sounds of the boys stirring, which inspired him with a desire to clear out with all speed.

Changeling, smoking his pipe comfortably, watched his hasty retreat with a smile of ineffable satisfaction on his face.

"He puts up for bein' clever," he muttered, "but what a fool he is! Fancy his swallering that yarn! Nap laid it on him pretty thick, but he said nuthin' about going to send him away. That's *my* verdict to even-up the taking of the launch, as if it was his own property, without consulting me."

Changeling, it will be seen, was in a revengeful but playful mood. The loss of the "Dart" had wounded him sorely, but he was devoid of all bitter animus. Still, he was impelled to have some sort of revenge, and he conceived the plan of worrying Chorker in every way without inflicting on him any real bodily harm.

Anyway, he was a man who was not likely to be keenly missed, and if missed at all, there would be very few interested in his fate.

Jim and quite a host of his closer admirers turned out early, bent on beginning the task of building a residence for Charley, the bear.

As the choice of a site was left to Jim, he decided it should be erected at the rear of the post-office, using the blank wall side of that structure as a lean-to for Charley's residence.

Steene was there with the key of the carpenter's shop, which he threw open, and a score or so of youngsters, who were learning the business, were summoned to bear a hand in the cutting up of timber into suitable lengths, and to fashion the chief wooden supports.

Jim and the young blacksmiths worked at the forge, making holdfasts and nails of the requisite length, while Morse planned out the simple structure and set others to work digging the foundations.

Although they had every faith in the pacific nature of Charley, it was considered essential that he should have a place which would keep him in when once the door was closed, and defy all attempts on his part to get out again, supposing he should, in a fit of excitement, endeavour to do so at a forbidden time.

The men took no part in the work, but they looked on with amused interest both before breakfast and afterwards.

"If they only go at their lessons as they do at that job," said Martin, "they will turn out mighty clever boys."

"You could not expect 'em to do so," remarked Changeling; "one is pleasure, and t'other isn't. It ain't nateral for them to work so hard *at* work as when at play."

There was so much obvious truth in this statement that nobody attempted to argue the point.

During the morning Mr. Farrell came out and watched the operations going on in gloomy silence, until it suddenly occurred to him that he would like to see the object of all this labour.

He did not address himself to Jim, but to Morse, whom he had always looked up to with something of a feeling of awe, since he had learnt how clever he was as a manufacturer of explosive materials.

"What has been done with that creature, Morse?" he asked—"the bear, I mean?"

"He is in the ordinary woodshed for the present, sir," replied Morse.

"I suppose I can see the animal?"

"Certainly, sir, if you wish it."

"You had better show me the place. I almost forget where the woodshed is situated."

This was a terrible crammer uttered by the schoolmaster. He knew where to find the woodshed, but he was unwilling to go thither alone, even though he fully expected to find Charley securely chained up.

How much less willing would he have been had he known that that sapient creature was loose!

Morse, of course, had no fear of the bear, and on arriving at the woodshed he threw open the door, and Charley calmly walked out.

"Murder!—help!" cried Mr. Farrell, backing up against the wall opposite. "Put him back, Morse, for mercy's sake!"

"He won't harm you, sir," replied Morse, "unless you attempt to run away. Charley, be quiet!"

Charley was eyeing the schoolmaster with anything but favour, and had they been alone there would have been something unpleasant. But as things were he was amenable to discipline, and contented himself with angrily glaring at the terrified man, and growling in a low tone.

"He is a fine animal, isn't he, sir?" said Morse, secretly enjoying Mr. Farrell's fear and agony.

"Ye-e-e-s, Morse!" was the stammering reply, "but do-o-o you think he is *exactly* the sort of creature to keep—a be-a-ar in the house?"

"Well, you see, sir," said Morse, thoughtfully, "we've got him. Just *got* him."

"But he could be kille-e-ed?"

Charley must have understood, or he may have obeyed some secret sign from Morse as well-trained horses do in a circus, for he rose up on his hind legs and pawed the air in a slow, impressive way, illustrative of clawing the life out of a man.

The sight to a man of Mr. Farrell's temperament was appalling. He would have fled if he dared, but remembering the warning of Morse, he glued himself against the wall, and gasped out:

"Put him back again—put him back, I beg of you!"

"But you must see the tricks he can do, sir," urged Morse.

"I am sure he can do them to perfection, and I—I would rather not," muttered the wretched man.

"He is fond of showing off," said Morse, doubtfully, "and, having been brought out, he expects to go through his performance. He won't like being put back as if he were a common bear. Though good-tempered, as a rule, he is now and then uncertain."

"Will it take lo-o-ong?" asked Mr. Farrell.

"Only a few minutes, sir," cheerfully answered Morse.

"Be as quick as you can, please," murmured the schoolmaster.

It was pitiful to see how this man belied his name and pretensions in every way. While Charley went through some of his tricks, he leant against the wall, his face white and bedewed with perspiration. He was filled with the fears that the coward feels on the battle-field, where, according to the poet, he dies a thousand deaths.

Morse at length put Charley back into the woodshed, and Mr. Farrell hastened away, in a condition of fear and wrath not easy to describe.

As for permitting such an animal as a bear residing at the school, he would not permit it. As soon as he could get the chance he would poison the brute.

He had some knowledge of chemistry, and could distil certain poisons, such as the belladonna from the deadly nightshade plant.

He had a retort, although he rarely used it, and he would get it into order at once. The rest of the morning he was busy preparing it for use in his private room.

Chorker had to wait until past noon in the chine ere he saw Changeling coming leisurely along with a bundle in his hand and a pipe in his mouth.

"Better late than niver," muttered Chorker, "but I think he might ha' brought it sooner. I feels wolfish."

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE POISON PREPARED.



I suppose you knows the time?" said Chorker, eyeing Changeling viciously.

"Can't say to half an hour or so," was the reply, "and you don't carry a watch, I reckon."

"And wot's here?" said Chorker, opening the bundle.

"What! these are the bits

of bread from the table and a small chunk o' cheese. You don't expect me to live on that, do yer?"

"It was the best I could lay my hands on to-day," said Changeling. "If you don't like it hand it back, and I'll see what I can get for you to-morrow."

Changeling put his hand out to take the food, but Chorker hastily drew back.

"I couldn't wait until to-morrow, nohow," he said; "I'll make the best on it. Where's them rugs to sleep on you promised me?"

"I forgot 'em," answered Changeling, repressing a grin. "They ain't easily got at, you know. I'm alser out o' 'bacca, and there won't be none given out till Nap Farrell is on the hopposite tack. At present he's a-sailing on the rampage. He's been looking for you, and I'm sure he had a knife up his sleeve."

"Now what can have made him so wenyxious agin me?"

"He says you are one of them smugglers and pirates, and he'll execute you."

"Good 'ivens!" muttered Chorker, "the bitterness of some people! It ain't nateral nor human."

"Well, good-bye," said Changeling, as he turned away. "Keep up your pecker till to-morrow."

He went off grinning, with some such thoughts as the following in his mind:

"'Bacca and blankets for you, Chorker? Not I if knows it. You've got to do pennants for yer sins, my boy. A little sufferin' won't be throwed away upon you."

On his return, he had a private interview with Morse

and Jim, which seemed to be highly satisfactory on both sides.

Meanwhile, Mr. Farrell had been busy. In the secrecy of his room, with the door locked, he was engaged in distilling belladonna from the deadly nightshade plant. He reckoned that an ounce of the extract would suffice to terminate the existence of Charley, but to make sure he would prepare double the quantity. It would take some three hours to do so.

Twice during the afternoon he was interrupted, once by Mrs. Farrell and once by Eveline. When they knocked at the door he had to let them in, and they were naturally curious to learn what he was doing.

"Giving myself some mental relaxation by studying chemistry," sufficed for Mrs. Farrell, but not for Eveline.

She could see by the constrained manner of her father that he had something more than mere relaxation on his mind.

But she affected to accept his answer as satisfactory, and only waited long enough to note the particular bottle into which he put the liquid as it was distilled.

The boys through the day had worked well, and by nightfall Charley's residence was well on the way towards completion.

The frame was fixed and the roof on. Also some of the wall-work was fixed.

They made it strong with wooden buttresses outside, so that internal pressure would have to be very great to force a way through.

Early on the following morning they were up again, and by the afternoon the building was completed.

The ceremony of introducing Charley to his new home was rather imposing. Eveline made a garland of flowers, which was placed round his neck, and with the school band in front of him, and the rest of the boys in marching order in the rear, he was paraded up and down three times in front of the house ere he was taken to his residence.

Charley showed by various well-known little tricks that he was highly pleased by the arrangement. When the time came to lock him in, he thrust his snout through a small opening in the wall, left to give him light and air, and snorted his thanks for all the trouble taken on his account.

Morse and Jim drew aside to exchange a whisper concerning a little trip the former was about to take back to the cavern beneath the castle.

His object was to render the cave an untenable place for Chorker, and drive him to the open air.

They were aware of Changeling's little game, and bent on supplementing it with sundry devices of their own. Chorker may therefore be considered to have prospectively a very trying time of it.

But for him, as Changeling said, Mr. Farrell would never have attempted to leave the island, and the launch would still be available for a trip to Gibraltar.

"We may consider ourselves fairly shut in here," said Jim. "Until we can send letters home, they cannot forward assistance."

"That will be some time in coming," suggested Morse.

"Assuredly. Our Home Government will not interfere before communicating with the Spanish authorities, and months will elapse ere we shall get an additional hand to help us."

"And we may want one."

"We may. For although the island seems to be clear of enemies at the present, they will return by-and-by. The Spaniard on revenge intent never rests until he is successful. I wonder why they pitched into Groby?"

"For the lack of something better they gave him a taste of their quality. By the way, I wonder how he is getting on?"

"Romeo tells me that he seems to be better in some ways, but he has given up talking, and lies all the time with his eyes fixed as if he were thinking."

"He is in a bad way altogether."

They parted, and Morse hastened in the direction of the castle, and Jim went off to a quiet nook for a bathe.

The ceremony of introducing Charley to his new home was observed by Mr. Farrell from the window of his room. It brought a bitter smile to his face.

"They have more love for that brute than they ever had for me," he muttered, "and perhaps they think that he is the nobler creature. He may be, but for all that he has to die."

CHAPTER LXVIII.

CHARLEY DRINKS A DRAUGHT.



JIM that night, prior to retiring, went into the classroom and removed the bars, which had been replaced. Almost at the same minute Romeo, outside, placed a ladder against the wall and crept softly up.

"What time Massa Morse come back, you tink?" he asked, in a whisper.

"It is quite uncertain," replied Jim; "but if you hear him making for his dormitory in the night, don't get it into your head that the ghosts are abroad."

Romeo grinned, and the whites of his eyes as he rolled them were plainly visible in the gloom.

"Dem ghostesses," he said, "make a poor job ob

getting 'way, anyhow," he said. "I put de question, as it am my intention to lay out a bit ob supper on one ob de desks and leab a candle burning at de larse moment."

"It is very thoughtful of you, Romeo," said Jim, "and Morse will be grateful. How is your patient, Mr. Groby?"

"Still in de same way. He not say a word to me since tree dis afternoon, but he just lay tinkin—tinking like a pusson who got into a corner and could not see his way out ob de same."

"But his wounds are healing?"

"Worrerfully quick, Massa Gordon. Me know de stuff to do it. Medicine-woman in de ole country gib me a lesson how to make dat stuff."

"Well, good-night," said Jim.

"Good-night, Massa Gordon, and sweep depose to you."

Jim went off to the dormitory, where the boys were already getting into bed, and varying the work of undressing with a little skylarking.

They could all see that Morse's bed was empty, but nobody asked a question concerning him. Morse was out of the common in all his habits, and the general assumption was that he was in his laboratory indulging in some of his experimental work, which they generally believed would one day suddenly terminate his studious existence.

By-and-by the house was still. Its long passages and huge rooms were wrapped in darkness, save in the class-room, where a solitary candle was burning beside a tray, on which Romeo had placed supper for Morse.

Outside there was stillness also, and the moon in the sky lying low in the west.

The sea lazily rolled upon the shore, each wave sliding sleepily to and fro, just stirring the shingle and lifting the boats moored a short distance from the shore.

It was a night of still beauty—a time of peace.

Close upon twelve o'clock the door of the school-house was softly opened, and Mr. Farrell came creeping out.

In one hand he had a saucer with a little sugar in it; in the other hand a bottle containing about two ounces of liquid.

He was aware of the fondness of bears for anything sweet, and how in their wild state they will seek most earnestly for the store of the bee, and run the risk of being stung into a condition bordering on madness for the sake of a mouthful of honey.

He had therefore prepared the saucer and sugar as the introductory means to the taking of the belladonna. He proposed, when he got near Charley's hut, to pour the liquid into the saucer and place it on the sill of the little window, which was, of course, unglazed.

Charley would soon smell out the sugar, and lose no time in getting at it.

It was a cunning idea, and it was more than likely to prove successful, owing to its simplicity. He moistened the sugar with the contents of the phial, and creeping under the window, carefully placed the saucer in position.

That done, he retreated, and watched for the result.

The moon gave light enough, and more than enough, for him to see clearly from a distance of twenty yards. Presently, after the lapse of a few minutes, he heard a movement within the hut and shuffling of heavy feet, accompanied by a low, snorting sound.

Shortly after that he beheld a long, red tongue come out of the darkness beyond the window-frame and travel slowly round the saucer.

So lightly and delicately was it done that it was evident Charley was aware of the ticklish position of the saucer, and was anxious to avoid upsetting it.

He was successful in this until he had absorbed the mixture and set to work giving the saucer a last lick round, on the off-chance of discovering a few more stray drops of the delicious contents.

That soon brought it down outside, and Charley, knowing that the little feast was over, retired again to his bed.

Mr. Farrell waited for some time—perhaps a quarter of an hour—ere he ventured up to recover the emptied vessel, which might otherwise be evidence to convict him of a cowardly deed. He listened under the window, but could hear no sound, and, with the conviction that he had succeeded in his design, he picked up the saucer and retreated into the house.

He did not feel exactly like a murderer, but he experienced sensations approaching the internal disturbance of one of those ultra-criminals, and he was not sorry when he was within the shelter of his abode and had closed the door.

He had brought a light down with him, but for some reason it had gone out, or been blown out, and after groping about for it in vain, he was obliged to crawl upstairs in the dark.

His way led past the door of the sleeping-room of the negroes, as we have previously intimated, and from the sacred precincts of that chamber there came the sounds of most unearthly snoring that appalled him.

His blood ran cold, and in his bewilderment and childish terror he lost his way, so that, instead of returning to his sleeping-chamber, he eventually found himself outside the class-room door.

Instinctively he knew it, and he stopped short, for there was a ray of light streaming through the keyhole.

Light in the class-rooms at this hour!

What did it mean?

He stooped down and tried to get a view of the interior, but failed. But he could hear a faint clinking.

sound, as of steel or glass, or it might be earthenware.

"Some trick of the boys," he muttered.

Having gone through a course of fear himself, it occurred to the schoolmaster that it would be an agreeable thing to give the audacious midnight revellers, as he conceived them to be, a bit of a scare.

If he popped in upon them without a moment's notice, they would be running to and fro like frightened hares.

He laid hold of the handle of the door, and tried to turn it.

Unluckily for the success of his scaring plan, it stuck a bit, and fully three seconds elapsed ere he could open the door.

And, owing to its sticking a bit, the hinges gave out a faint screech.

When at length he got the door open the room was in darkness, save at the upper end, where a ray of moonlight streamed through a corner of the window.

The schoolmaster was staggered, but he was sure of his quarry, and in the old, bounceable style, he said:

"This won't do, boys! You are very sharp, but you don't deceive me. Light up again, and let me see who you are."

Not a sound was made in response. Mingled wrath and fear roused the schoolmaster to further expostulation and threats.

"If you do not show yourselves," he said, angrily, "you will be severely punished."

Rashly he stepped into the room, and the moment he had done so there was a bright flash of light behind him.

It was, even though his back was towards it, of almost blinding brilliancy.

The next moment the door banged to.

He attempted to rush towards it, but was immediately conscious of an aroma that was, in a sense, familiar.

He had first, in the company of Chorker, become acquainted with it when he was a prisoner in the cave.

Well he knew the result of inhaling it, and, with a wail of terror, he dropped upon his knees.

An attempt to crawl at a low level to the door, as people have done through a room filled with smoke, was frustrated by unconsciousness, which came over him with great rapidity and stretched him, still as a fallen statue, on the floor.

CHAPTER LXIX.

ROMEO RELIEVED OF A DUTY.



FROM absolute insensibility Mr. Farrell awoke to find himself being lifted from the floor by Romeo, who was uttering expressions of mingled grief and surprise.

"What am de marrers ar?" he asked, dolorously; "who am 'sponsible for dis?"

Sure, no burglars been here? an' me know dat you nebber take too much drink. 'Pears to me dat you been walking in you sleep."

"Romeo," said Mr. Farrell, feebly, "what's the time?"

"'Bout half-parse six, sar."

"Then I have been here since midnight. I—I went out for a stroll, being unable to sleep, and coming back saw a light in the schoolroom. It shone through the keyhole."

"Blessmer, sar, you don't say so!" exclaimed the amazed Romeo.

"Yes, a light streaming through the keyhole. I opened the door, and somebody immediately fell upon me. We struggled for a time, but on receiving a blow from behind I became insensible."

"You don't say so, sar!"

"But I *do* say so. Can you get me a cup of tea?"

"Yes, sar."

"Then bring it here sharp, as my mouth has a parched feeling."

Romeo vanished from the room, closed the door, picked up a tray with the remnants of a supper upon it, and disappeared in the direction of the kitchen, grinning all over his face.

"Massa Morse and him 'sposers agin de world," he exclaimed, as he entered the culinary sanctum.

"What dat you say?" demanded Macbeth, who was heating an urn preparatory to making tea in it.

"Massa Morse's hair de sort to curl—dat what me say," replied the veracious Romeo.

"Dat not de trufe," bawled out Hamlet from the region of the scullery; "you was a-sayin' sumfin 'bout 'sposers."

"What am 'sposers?" asked Romeo.

"Corruptions," said Macbeth, "sich as we see once at Pesuvius on de bust."

"Den dere nuffin' ob dat sort 'bout Massa Morse," asserted Romeo, warmly. "He reg'lar milky kind ob chap; good boy, but not a Resuvius. When de tea ready?"

"In five minutes."

"Massa Farrell want a cup. He been out on de spree all night, an' took bad in de schoolroom."

"On de spree?" exclaimed the amazed Macbeth.

"Seem so," said Romeo. "Anyway, when me went in dere to sweep up de dust, dere he was, on him back, snorin' like a full congregative at de chapel, sermon-time. Dere a ladder by de window, showin' how he got in."

"Dat true enough," bawled out Hamlet from the rear; "it am wisible at dis moment."

Macbeth went out, accompanied by Romeo, and they both had a look at the ladder. The latter quietly took it away from the window, remarking, "Dat he see no use in reposin' de massa to de boys."

"But what hab he been a-doin'?" asked Macbeth; "dere no place for larks on de island."

"Dere more dan you 'speck," said Romeo, mysteriously. "But about dis cup ob tea; he want him berry badly."

The tea was hurried on, and Romeo took a cup to Mr. Farrell, who was sitting dejectedly on one of the forms in the schoolroom.

He could make nothing of his mysterious adventure the night before, nor could he associate it in any way with his similar experience in the cave. It was the darkest and deepest of mysteries to him, and naturally his thoughts turned towards the supernatural.

He asked Romeo if he ever heard any sounds or saw any sights that could be called out of the common in the house, and Romeo plunged into a record of the sufferings from spirits endured by his father and grandfather.

Mr. Farrell listened, not liking to believe, but, coupling it with his own experience, hardly able to avoid doing so.

It was a great puzzle, to say the least.

He went away to his room and sat down in his chair. He knew that sooner or later he would be missed by Mrs. Farrell, who would come in search of him. One of the curious portions of the feminine nature is that the more worthless a man is, the more interest they take in his movements, if there is the least mystery in the matter.

He heard her coming, and feigned to be sound asleep. He had a part to play.

Mrs. Farrell opened the door and peeped in. Her spouse favoured her with a soft snore by way of salute.

"Nap!" she exclaimed.

He opened his eyes and stared about him with well-feigned bewilderment.

"Where am I?" he asked, imitating the stage-heroine aroused from slumber.

"Why, in your study, Nap," she said, "and it is morning."

"Morning!" he repeated, incredulously; "then I must have been asleep in this chair all night. I am sorry, my dear, that you did not think it worth your while to rouse me."

"I fell asleep last night," she said, "and did not awake until this morning. I am very sorry."

"Never mind, my dear," he said, with elephantine cheerfulness; "it is rather trying to the constitution, but matters might have been worse."

"Can I get you a cup of tea, Nap?"

"No, my dear."

"I should have thought you required one."

He had forgotten that he was concealing from her very material facts, and quickly changed his mind.

"I meant that I shall be very glad of one," he said.

So the bell was rung, but there was no response, and after waiting awhile Mrs. Farrell rang again. Almost immediately the soft footstep of Romeo was heard approaching.

Presenting himself at the door, he exhibited a pair of wild eyes starting from his head.

"Massa Groby!" he gasped.

"What in the name of all misfortune has happened?" cried the schoolmaster.

"He gone," said Romeo; "cl'ared out in de night Put on him clothes, filled a bag wif extra clothes, and gone orf."

"But the man was still seriously ill," said Mr. Farrell; "his wounds could only be half healed."

"Still he am gone," insisted Romeo, "and dere a letter lef for someborry on de table."

"Then why did you not bring it with you?"

"Massa, how me know who it am for? You don't 'spect a poor nigger like me to read de writing."

"I will see who it is addressed to," said the schoolmaster.

He left the room, beckoning to Romeo to follow him, fearing his tongue might run loose and utter forbidden matter.

In Mr. Groby's room there were many indications of hasty departure—drawers open, odd things tossed upon the floor, a store of clothing diminished and disarranged.

On the table was a note folded and addressed to the schoolmaster, but not sealed down or fastened in any way.

Its contents were very brief.

"I have left this house, unable to stay under a roof where I have conceived and executed so much bitter wrong. It is my intention to make for the woods, and in a lonely existence do something towards the expiation of my sins."

That was all. Mr. Farrell, not being in the secret of much of the conduct of his departed master, knew not what to make of it. One thing only was clear: Romeo was relieved of a duty, and he dismissed him to attend to his ordinary work.

CHAPTER LXX.

POISON-PROOF.



GENERALLY speaking, there was much wondering over the departure of Mr. Groby, especially while he was practically in a dangerous condition. But with the few who knew of the mistaken course he had taken, there was only mild surprise.

"His conscience pricked him," said Jim, when he heard of it from Morse, who had acquired the information from Romeo, "which shows he has some good in him after all."

"Sick people," remarked Morse, "are more sensitive than those in sound health."

"What on earth will the man do?"

"Starve, in all likelihood; but if I understand the man, he will never willingly come back."

"It will be a relief to Eveline," said Jim, "for she feared him."

It was, and if she didn't show any great anxiety concerning the fate of the missing man, she may be pardoned, for, thanks to him, she had suffered keenly.

The whole school was getting accustomed to startling events, and the absence of Chorker seemed to trouble nobody. The boys and men missed him, but only Changeling knew what had become of him, and he kept his knowledge to himself.

During the morning, about eleven o'clock, the boys went to the hut occupied by Charley, and found that wonderfully social animal alive and merry. He did not seem an atom the worse for his overnight dose, but, on the contrary, if possible, more skittish than ever.

With a strong escort of admirers, Jim led him away in the direction of Silver Bay, and there they found a shady spot to lie down and talk. The members of the Council of Ten gathered round Morse, knowing he had a story to tell, and Charley rolled about in the sand, and playing all sorts of antics, excited the laughter of the other boys.

"I went last night," said Morse, "right away through the cavern to the mouth of it, where I discovered Chorker doing his best to make himself comfortable for rest. He was in a grumbling mood, and spoke his thoughts aloud, so that I could hear every word. He was very bitter against Changeling for not bringing him some rugs, and was busy building up a bank of sand to keep off the inevitable draught. The fact of there being no wind to speak

of outside, does not lessen the usual current of air in a place of that description."

"You had left the trap open," remarked Terry.

"I had. Well, he settled himself to his satisfaction at last, and was curling himself up, when I uttered a loud groan. Up he jumped, and, without waiting to investigate the noise, rolled out of the cave and went headlong down to the level of the chine. I peeped out and saw him lying upon his back, and it was as much as I could do to keep from laughing loudly. But he did not lie there long.

"It was easy to see the very working of his features in the light of the moon, as he raised his face and stared apprehensively upward to the cave," continued Morse. "I rubbed a little of a new luminous paint I have made over my face, and grimacing horribly, thrust it out so that he could see it, and away he went down the chine, blundering over every obstacle, tumbling here and there, but only to rise again to his feet and pound away, until I lost sight of him. Then I had my laugh out and came back to the castle. And now a very strange thing happened that gave me a shaking."

He paused for a moment, and there was expectancy on every face. Grave and thoughtful was the countenance of Morse as he proceeded.

"I have not spoken of it to anyone earlier, because I wished to think it out, and make sure that I was not mistaken. On reflection, I am sure I was not. You are all aware that I am not easily scared?"

"Decidedly we are!" they chorused.

"I am not, and that is a fact," continued Morse; "but I confess to you that my very hair stood up as, on thrusting my head above the trap-door, I heard a footstep in the council-chamber where we have our beds planted. None of you were up there last night, I suppose?"

They all assured him they were not, and he nodded his head as if he looked for that reply, and accepted it in all faith.

"I was certain of it myself," he said, "and instead of hastening out, as I should have done expecting any of you, I crept to the door and gently drew back the bolt. But there was nobody in the room beyond, nor in the courtyard, nor near the castle, that I could discover."

"Deuced odd!" muttered Terry.

"It is more than that," said Morse. "Bent on discovering who it was, I returned to my own den, armed myself with certain inflammatory protectors against assault, and, putting out the light, waited for half an hour. But whoever it was did not return."

"Who can it be?" asked Jim.

"Ah, there you beat me," answered Morse. "As it was none of you, as I know, and none of the men, as I verily believe, it must have been a stranger. Again comes the question, who was it?"

"May have been Groby," suggested Felton.

"Romeo saw him there at eleven o'clock, in his room. Afterwards he had to look out his clothes, pack his bag, and come up the path. In his state of health he could not have done it. Furthermore, it was a soft, slobby, shuffling tread I heard, such as would not emanate from him, even in his weakened condition. No; we had a stranger there. Query, then—who?"

They could not help him, and he remained in darkness. The only course to take was to watch and find out who the intruder was. There they had to leave the matter, and Charley having had sufficient exercise for the day, they hastened back.

During their absence Mr. Farrell had been out, and timorously drawing near the door of the hut, saw that it was open and the bear gone. He could make nothing of that, for he was almost certain it would be found dead. In any case, he expected to learn that the bear was seriously ill.

It was too bulky to be removed by the boys if he had killed it, and while he pondered on the subject he was addressed by Eveline, who had stolen up behind him.

"I thought you were afraid of the bear?" she said.

"My child, it is not here," he answered.

"The boys have taken it out. There was something the matter with it."

"Sick or ill?"

"No, but more lively than usual. Almost as stupid in its frivolous ways as some men are when they have been drinking."

"How strange!"

"So Morse said. He was of opinion that it must have eaten or drunk something wrong. But, as he said, what would kill anything else was good for Charley."

"The brute is poison-proof," muttered the schoolmaster, aghast. "I must find out some other way of killing him."

As he turned aside, Eveline smiled in a peculiar way. She knew what puzzled him, and understood why the poison had not worked.

It was her hand that removed it from the phial during her father's absence from his study, and in the place of belladonna was nothing but plain water when he prepared the dose for Charley.

It was a matter, she felt, on which silence would be golden, and she kept the secret of the failure to herself.

Anyway, she had succeeded in stopping all efforts in that direction to take Charley's life. Whether it would ultimately ensure the safety of that animal remains to be seen.

CHAPTER LXXI.

CORRESPONDENCE PROHIBITED.



IT was about time when a homeward-bound mailboat was expected, and on the following day the boys began to prepare letters to their friends. Mr. Farrell, hearing of this proceeding, promptly issued a general order that all letters would have to be left open for his

perusal prior to being sent away.

The indignation aroused by this command was very great. But the schoolmaster had a plausible statement to make that he hoped would soften down the situation.

He gave it just previous to dinner, when all had assembled at the table.

"I feel," he said, "that some irritation may be felt on reading my general order, but it is kindly meant. Granted that we have recently been disturbed by events of a very serious nature, I am convinced that they have now terminated. To write home alarming accounts of our life here would be to end the school, which I, for one, do not think necessary or desirable. On that score, and that alone, I wish to peruse the letters for this mail. If written at all, they must be finished to-night, and sent into my study before nine o'clock. I will sacrifice some hours' sleep looking over them."

Nothing was said by way of assent or dissent to this address. The boys settled into their places, and ate their dinner more or less in moody silence. To some of the more timid the position was getting on a level with that of foreign captivity. The chances of getting away from the island each day appeared more and more remote.

Of course, in time their friends would be inquiring after them, but the vast majority had sent their sons or relatives thither for a long term, receiving a full assurance that they need not be anxious about them. Only here and there would uneasiness be created by a break in the correspondence.

But after dinner the suppressed anger found vent in a public meeting of the boys, called by Jim Gordon. They met on the quoit-ground of the men, who were also in attendance.

In opening the proceedings, Jim said:

"Chums all. You have heard Nap's explanation of his extraordinary tyrannical order, and for my own part I may say that I do not believe the reason he gives for it is the real one."

Cries of "No more do we."

"Well, being of one mind on that point," continued Jim, "let us see what the real reason is. May I not assume that he is afraid the truth should be known about himself?"

Yells of "That's it!"

"He fears that a revelation of his cowardly conduct will get abroad," resumed Jim, "but no doubt hopes that in time we shall all forget it."

"Never."

"No, never, boys. But for all that I do not think we need make a song about it. If, as he suggests—although I can't quite accept the idea—that we shall now be at peace, the life here will suit most of us. I have had occasion to suggest this to you on a previous occasion, but I feel I must enforce it now. The life, I say, suits most of us. Therefore, we wish it to go on."

"Certainly. Why not? Hurrah for Jim Gordon!"

"Still the question remains," said Jim, holding up a hand for silence, "what are we to do in the matter of letter-writing? On this point I have a suggestion to make to you, which I hope you will act upon."

"Out with it, Jim! We are with you."

"Very good, boys. Then my suggestion is that, as we cannot write letters unless Nap is to read them, we write none at all."

A wild shout of approval, in which the men joined, rent the air. When order was restored, Jim resumed:

"For this mail, at least, let there be no mistake. If any of you here wish to send a letter home, say so now, or signify the same by holding up your hand."

At first there was no response, but just as Jim was about to declare the resolve to have no correspondence unanimous, one small hand was held up in the thick of the crowd.

"One for sending home," said Jim. "Who is it?"

"Dibble," was the reply.

"Poor Dibble," said Jim, compassionately; "come forward, my boy, and let me see you."

An undersized lad, with a pale, anxious face, was pushed forward up to Jim, who took him kindly by the hand.

"So you wish to send a letter home?" he said.

"Yes," timidly replied the boy, "to my aunt. She said I was to write to her every mail, or when I had finished school she would apprentice me to a sweep." There was a tendency to laugh at this reply, but Jim stopped it with a word.

"Boys," he said, "Dibble's lot is a hard one. No parents, and left to the care of a beggarly old aunt, who will inherit his property if he dies ere he comes of age. She does her level best to worry him out of existence. Write your letter, old man, and I'll take it out to the boat when the time comes, even if there is not another to go with it."

Dibble's letter was the only one mentioned, for not even the men intended to write. For the most

part they were troubled with few outside friends. The business of the meeting having come to an end, it broke up.

Mr. Farrell was glad he had carried his point, for he really expected considerable resistance. It made him feel that he was again getting the whip-hand of the school.

He had worries still, and was likely to have them. There was the continued absence of Mr. Groby, for instance. At the outset he thought it probable that the man would come back, but there was no sign or word from him.

He refrained from letting his wife or daughter Eveline know of the issued order, and they, having no letters to write, took little or no interest in the mail. When the night came, Mr. Farrell, at the hour he named, went into his study, and found a solitary letter on the table.

He stared at it, looked at his watch, assured himself it was going by putting it to his ear, and sat down.

"One letter!" he exclaimed. "What does it mean?"

He waited a few minutes, and then summoned Romeo into his presence by ringing the bell.

"Who brought this letter here?" he asked.

"Me sar," replied Romeo.

"Who gave it to you?"

"Massa Gordon."

"But there were others, surely?"

"No, sar. He sat dat it am all. None ob de oder boys am goin' to write."

"You may go," said Mr. Farrell, abruptly.

Romeo vanished, with one of his expansive grins upon his expressive face, and the schoolmaster frowningly stared at the letter.

"I see it all," he muttered. "They tacitly defy me. I am not to see their letters. I cannot do so if they will not write them. And not writing is almost as bad as sending the truth to England."

He took up the letter and toyed with it for a few moments ere he pulled out the paper from the envelope. Little Dibble's letter was as follows:

"MY DEAR AUNT,—

"I am very well and happy here, and I hope you are the same. The weather couldn't be finer, and the plums are getting ripe. I help in the market garden, as they call it, where all our vegetables are grown. Last week I had a carbuncle on my nose, but it is gone now, so no more from your affectionate nephew.

"OSCAR DIBBLE."

"Exasperating," muttered the schoolmaster, as he closed the envelope and threw it upon the table. "I can guess who arranged this farce for my benefit. Very good, Mr. Jim Gordon. It is not the first time you have made me ridiculous. I will endeavour somehow to make it the last."

From angry, vengeful meditations he was aroused by a slight, tapping sound. He could not for the

moment locate it, but turning his eyes towards the windows, he beheld something the sight of which froze the very blood in his veins.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.



IT was a face at the window, pressed close to it, and made hideous by the flattening of the features against the glass.

The eyes were wild and staring, and he could see the mouth move as if speaking, but no sound reached his ears.

He fancied there was something in the features that was familiar, but could not recall them. Indeed, in his terror, he was hardly capable of thinking clearly at all.

Still as a figure of stone he stood for a moment, and then he staggered towards the bell-pull, and tugged it with all his might.

The next instant he tremulously looked at the window again. The face was gone.

With enfeebled step he tottered from the room and vanished in the direction of his bed-chamber, ere Romeo appeared.

The darkie entered the room, peered around, and seeing nobody, was about to retire, when he, too, glanced at the window.

The face was there again.

Now Romeo was not quite so nervous as the school-master, but anything coming like this suddenly upon him fairly petrified him.

A perspiration broke out like oil upon his countenance, and his quivering wool shimmered in the light of the lamp.

In addition to the face, a claw-like hand appeared at the window, and tapped upon it.

Romeo stared, unable to move.

"Here, you boy!" cried the voice of Macbeth outside, "whar am you, Romeo?"

"Here!" gasped Romeo.

"Oh, dere, am you? Am you aweer dat you leab undone some ob you work in—" Macbeth came into the room bristling with wrath, caught sight of that horrible face, and went down flop into a sitting position.

Then once again that face vanished.

"Romeo!" groaned Macbeth.

"Yes, gran'dad," said Romeo.

"Whar de two sticks to cross?"

"Under de bed in my room."

"Fetch dem and keep dat sperrit out," said Macbeth. But Romeo had no faith in his own impostures, and advocated clearing out at once.

"Berrer get 'way to bed right orf," he said, "dat de bess ting to do."

"It not quite time yet," pleaded Macbeth. "Get dem sticks, I say!"

This Romeo plainly declined to do. He said, with some truth, that up to that time he had only undertaken to keep the ghosts out of the bedroom shared by him and his progenitors.

"For difelent places," he said, "difelent tings wanted."

"Den what am wanted on dis 'casion?" asked Macbeth, as they hastened down the passage.

"Dat me not know," replied Romeo, and once in a way he spoke the truth.

He did not know. Imaginary ghosts were one thing, real ghosts another matter to deal with.

Encountering the boys on the way to bed, they told Jim and Morse what they had seen, and it may be admitted that both were almost as much troubled as the negroes about it. Not that they believed for a moment in anything supernatural, but they feared something more substantial was in the matter.

But then came the question, What was the good of anyone getting up a scare by planting his face at the window, and who had felt the necessity of doing it?

The boys tried to get a description of the visitor from the niggers, but they could not agree as to details. If a detective had stood in need of a clue, he would not have obtained a shadow of one from either.

But there was no question about something human having been seen at the window, and the boys, with a sense of uneasiness, went to bed.

Mr. Farrell could not keep the secret of it either. He was too much alarmed to let it go by, and on the morrow he asked Martin to put two additional bars to his study window.

Whose face was it?

Morse, remembering the footsteps he had heard at the castle, coupled the two together, and, in his own mind, came to the conclusion that another enemy had appeared in the field.

Romeo had also a private opinion about it. He felt, as he had done once before, that he had outraged the feelings of some supernatural beings by getting up a sham spell to work against them, and although they had selected the window of the room of the school-

master for their first visitation, he was certain that they meant coming for him.

He passed a sleepless night listening to every sound, and it is a fact that, when the morning came, that hapless nigger had not slept a wink.

Macbeth, who had managed to sleep as usual, routed him out of bed, and Romeo went downstairs. After some rough preliminary work, he walked into the larder, where there was a window generally kept open.

It was the same window by which Chorker had entered in earlier days of our story.

It was open, of course, and Romeo would have paid no heed to that. It was the condition of his larder which staggered him.

On the previous evening, when he left it, there was a goodly store of cold food, part of a ham, a meat pie, and other things.

Now not a vestige of anything remained.

Barring a few crumbs, there was absolutely nothing, not so much as a biscuit.

Fortunately, the bread and butter, and a few more necessities, were not kept there in the bulk, but the fact remained—somebody had entered the place in the night, and purloined every available eatable.

"Dat face was no ghose," said Romeo, relieved in spite of his amazement. "Whoever it am got a big appetite. *Me* 'speck dat dis a case for 'mediate vestergation."

He first roused up his relatives, and introduced them to the state of things, which deprived them of the power of speech for fully five minutes. Macbeth was the first to recover.

"We berrer get Massa Farrell up, and let him see de condition ob de wittles dat am lost," he said.

He, as the eldest, was deputed to call up the schoolmaster, whom he soon brought to the spot in his dressing-gown. He, too, was in a measure relieved, but he could not recall the face clearly enough to say whom the marauder must have been.

"It wasn't Chorker, and it wasn't Groby. That I will swear," he said.

He repented now having prohibited letters being written, and not having written some himself. But there was perhaps yet time to pen a few words to his London agent to ask for assistance in getting away from the island.

"What time is the mail steamer expected?" he asked Romeo.

"Massa Gordon say last night dat it coming 'long dis way 'bout noon."

"Thanks; there is yet time."

The robbery of the larder caused some inconvenience in the house, but it was not serious, as things went on as usual for a few hours.

After breakfast Mr. Farrell penned a long statement of affairs, in which truth and fiction were strangely

mingled. He put it into an envelope, carefully sealed it, and then went in search of Gordon.

He encountered Romeo in the hall, and inquired after Jim.

"He gone to de steamer in de felucca, Massa."

"How dare he go without instructions from me?" hotly demanded the schoolmaster.

"Dere one letter to go," said Romeo, "and de smoke ob de steamer seen in de horizon more dan half-hour back."

Mr. Farrell rushed out and dashed down to the shore. Unmooring one of the lightest boats, he seized the sculls and pulled up the lagoon. As an oarsman, he was decidedly second-rate, but, by dint of extra application, he got the boat along at a fair speed.

By-and-by he obtained a view of the open sea, and in the distance was the felucca standing off and on for the steamer, which was bearing down upon it.

Was there time for the schoolmaster to reach it ere the felucca had cast aboard its limited mail of one letter? Anyway it was worth a trial, and Mr. Farrell bent to the oars until he threatened almost to break his back.

He tugged, and he tugged, until he thought half his journey to the felucca was done, and then he looked round.

Too late! The steamer had met with the felucca, and Jim was in the very act of casting a small parcel on board. Some words were exchanged between him and the officer, who picked up the parcel, and then on went the steamer at racing speed.

"Stop!" cried the schoolmaster, but at that distance his voice could not be heard. The felucca came gaily towards him, making for the shore.

Jim, and his old sea chums, Lal Brodie and Stiff, were in her. They brought the felucca before the wind, within a few yards of the boat, and Jim expressed his astonishment on finding the schoolmaster in open water.

"That boat, sir," he said, "is only fit for the lagoon."

"I want to send a letter by that steamer," gasped the schoolmaster.

"You have missed her, sir."

"But will she not pull up if we hail her?"

"The mate wanted to know why the deuce we dared stop him for a single letter. If we hailed him for a week he would not stop."

"It is most unfortunate," said Mr. Farrell, swallowing his wrath, "most unfortunate. We are in want of a few necessities on the island, but the next mail will do."

"Will you come on board, sir?"

"No—yes—I-I-suppose so."

He pulled up to them, and Lal Brodie steadied his

boat while he climbed into the felucca. He settled into the stern and was taken ashore without uttering another word. Nor did he say anything when they landed, but stalked away, angry with himself and them.

"I am glad I sold him," said Jim, coolly.

"Did you know he was going to send a letter?" asked Stiff.

"I was told so, and he was so preciously hasty about our correspondence, I was bent on upsetting his. We could have waited another half-hour before starting and then caught the steamer off the Eagle point, with the wind in this quarter."

"I wonder what is in his letter?" said Lal as he jumped ashore.

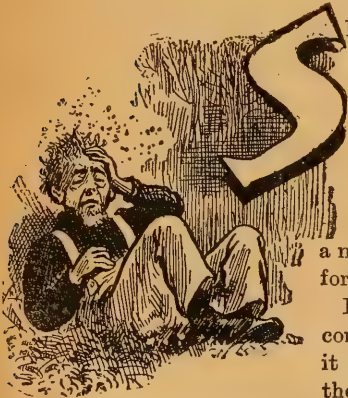
Jim did not answer him. He saw the letter lying at the bottom of the boat, and, under the circumstances, thought he was entitled to appropriate it. It was very bulky, and but for his being very quick in his movements he would not have succeeded in pocketing it without being observed.

"Fair spoil," said Jim. "As he claimed the right to read our correspondence, I think we have a right to peruse his."

And he sauntered off to read it in some sweet, secluded spot.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

CHORKER CAN STAND NO MORE OF IT.



SLEEPING in the open air is by some people considered to be the *ultima Thule* of human misery. Chorker was one of that class, and a night of it sufficed for him.

He selected a warm corner of the chine, it is true, and made the ground as soft as possible with fern-leaves, but it was anything but a comfortable resting-place. Apart from its inevitable hardness, a very large variety of nocturnal insects made a happy hunting-ground of his body and worried him until he was on the verge of madness.

Rising with the sun, he became aware of the fact that the said insects had so maltreated his countenance that it was puffed up so that he had only the smallest of orifices to see through. No prizefighter who had got the worst of a combat for the championship, ever showed a more distorted countenance.

With the idea of reducing its proportions, he washed it in the sea, with the result that the saltwater entering the small punctures made by his tormentors added forty per cent. to his pain and misery.

"I've had enough of this," he moaned as he sat down on the shore, rocking to and fro. "I'll go back as soon as the swelling is gone down, and Nap may do what he pleases to me."

It was some hours afterwards when Changeling appeared on the scene. There was no marked improvement in the appearance of Chorker beyond that he could see a wee bit clearer.

"Merciful 'ivens!" exclaimed Changeling, "what have you been doing with yourself?"

"Is it likely I should do it?" growled Chorker. "It's hinsects. Where's my breakfast?"

"There ain't none," said Changeling.

"What?"

"The larder was broken into last night, and all the perwisions appropriated."

Changeling then told the story of the face at the window, and the discovery made by Romeo in the morning. According to Changeling, he would not be able to get hold of any odd food that day—"but he might obtain some on the morrow."

"I'm coming back," said Chorker, surlily.

"The best thing you can do," assented Changeling, cheerfully facing about; "I'll help you along. That face of yours won't be down for a week. But you can lie close after you've seen Mr. Farrell. He's in a good humour this morning, and if you humbly ax him to overlook what you've done, it will be all right."

Chorker saw no other way out of his misery, and he allowed himself to be led back to the house, which fortunately was clear of the boys at the time. Furthermore, Changeling assisted him as far as the door of the schoolmaster's study and left him there.

"Go in," he whispered. "Here, I'll knock for you."

Changeling performed this office in a rather empty manner, and retreated.

"Come in," cried the voice of Mr. Farrell. Chorker opened the door and entered.

"Save me!" cried the schoolmaster, failing to recognise him. "What new horror is this?"

"I've come back agin orders, I know," said Chorker in a cracked voice, as unrecognisable as his face, "but you must overlook it."

"Orders!" gasped Mr. Farrell, backing across the room. "Keep off! Who are you? What are you?"

"Which my name is Chorker, and your humble servant," was the reply.

"Chorker!"

"The same, sir, and bent on making amends for a trifling horror. I went away as you wished, sir——"

"I wished nothing of the sort. I neither sent you away nor troubled myself what you did or where you

went. Confound you for a miserable old skunk! what do you mean by coming to my room in this condition? Get out of it! Go and hang yourself, if you like!"

Chorker got out with all speed. He saw it all now. He had been made the victim of a practical joke by that villain Changeling. Bubbling over with wrath, he sought and found him smoking his pipe by the sea opposite the house.

"Here," he said, "I want a word with you."

"Hutter it," said Changeling with emphasis, "and I pitches you into the sea."

Chorker never spoke that word, it would not have been prudent to do so, for Changeling was a man of his word, but, brimming with mortification, he sneaked into the house, and having begged some food from Romeo, retired to his room, and was seen no more that day.

While this scene was being enacted there was a meeting held of the Council of Ten in the castle. In one corner of the room the beds and bedding used by those who had recently stayed there were packed up ready for removal to the schoolhouse. The matter under discussion was the fact of some unknown visitor having paid a visit to the castle during the night.

"I was last here last night," said Morse, "and I put a light thread across the gateway, in addition to spreading some light powder on the track. This morning I was the first to arrive. The thread was broken and the powder was indented with footsteps—those of a man."

"It must be Groby," said Terry.

"No," answered Morse; "he would be wearing boots or walking with naked feet. These footmarks were made by a man whose feet are wrapped in cloth in strips, such as some of the poorer Spaniards wear in place of boots when walking any distance."

"Then you infer that the stranger is a Spaniard?" said Jim.

"Yes," replied Morse; "besides, Groby has rather small feet for a man, but these marks were made by one who is flat-footed."

"Why should he come here at all?"

It was Ganthony's question, and none could answer it, but all agreed it was necessary that the personality of this stranger should be ascertained with the least possible delay.

"It occurred to me this morning, when thinking over matters," said Jim, "that there is one coming danger—and possibly a great one—we have all overlooked."

"There may be many," sententiously remarked Felton.

"There is one that is certain," said Jim—"the Spaniard's nature is revengeful. Like the Corsican, he goes in for an occasional vendetta. Now, if we had destroyed all who were here, there might not be much

to worry about. But some have got away, and they will return to their homes with their version of the death of their companions."

"It will not be absolutely correct," said Hillyard.

"No doubt," continued Jim, "it will be a tissue of falsehoods. The ill-blood of the relatives of the men we were compelled to get rid of will be roused, and the possibility of their coming here in force is very apparent to me."

It was apparent to them all now, and they looked at each other with faces expressive of dismay. But Jim was not in the mood to speak apprehensively, save as a warning.

"The outcome of it is," he said, "that *we must be prepared*. The building of the forts must be resumed."

"Suppose Nap objects?" suggested Terry.

"I will interview Mrs. Farrell, who will remove his objections," replied Jim.

"Meanwhile," said Morse, "I will lay a trap for the intruder here."

The meeting then broke up, and, with the exception of Morse, who went to his laboratory, they adjourned to the incomplete earthworks to inspect them.

Half an hour was spent in this way, and then Morse was seen coming out, walking backwards, and strewing some light powder on the ground.

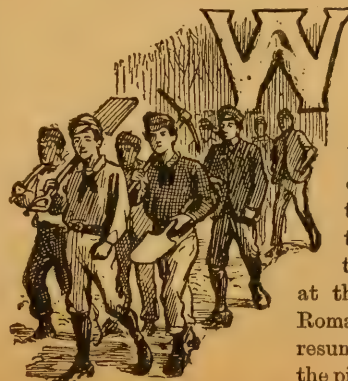
"You want another impression of the footsteps?" said Jim.

"I want more than that," answered Morse, in his even way, "and I shall get it if that fellow comes here again. For the rest of the day none of us must come near the castle."

More than that he would not say. He was far from being sure that an experiment he had on hand would be successful, and until he knew one way or the other he would say nothing.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE RESULT OF THE EXPERIMENT.



WITHOUT revealing their fears of a further invasion of the enemy, the members of the Council of Ten conveyed to the school generally that it was imperative that the works

at the Redan and the Roman Camp should be resumed. Accordingly the picks and spades and other implements were got out, and in the afternoon

the boys in a body marched to the scene of operations.

As expected, Mr. Farrell, on hearing of this movement, objected to it. He always objected to anything unless it originated from himself. But Jim had taken time by the forelock, and interviewed Mrs. Farrell prior to their departure.

He explained to her that the forts at least would do no harm, and might one day be of service. They also in erection gave employment to the boys, most of whom would otherwise be idle.

She entirely approved of them, and Jim in the most artful manner obtained a written assent to their being erected and completed from her.

Armed with this he was not dismayed when, in the middle of the afternoon, the schoolmaster, accompanied by his two remaining juniors, was seen coming up the path. It was clear that he had dragged Storeby and Turner into the affair as a moral support for himself.

"May I ask what this is?" he demanded, eyeing Jim with bent brows.

"We are completing the forts, sir," answered Jim.

"Mere folly—childishness, besides a wanton waste of time, resulting in the destruction of tools."

"Well, sir, it is approved of by Mrs. Farrell," said Jim.

Mr. Farrell came down three steps of the ladder of haughtiness, and exclaimed: "Indeed!"

"I have her written consent to go on with the works," continued Jim; "see here, sir. She is of opinion that they are desirable in more ways than one."

Mr. Farrell got off the ladder altogether, and stood on level ground.

"That," he said, "ahem! entirely alters the aspect of the case. Whatever is of a pleasing nature to my dear wife cannot be otherwise to me. You may resume operations, which may after all be beneficial to the health of the boys."

He turned away, and vanished downward with as much ease as he could summon under the circumstances. Mr. Turner laughed softly, and a quiet smile passed over the face of the other master.

"That letter," said the latter, "was, I suppose, Gordon, a bit of countermining?"

"Well, I thought Mr. Farrell might object," said Jim, "and prepared for it."

So the work went on that day, and as Morse took the precaution to have a sentry by the castle-gate to keep out intruders, nobody entered it. When the evening came the workers retired, and it was left sombre and impressive in the deepening gloom.

By-and-by, when the fulness of the night had come, the form of a man emerged from the wood and stole down to the castle, with the caution of one who fears death if he intruded. He looked about him as he

drew near, paused on the bridge awhile to listen, and then crept across it.

In the dark shadows of the gateway he stopped again, listening with all his ears, and again moved forward.

One step—two steps, and then a flash of light under his feet. There was no sound of explosion, but the cry of terror that burst from the man's lips might have been heard far away.

He sank upon his knees, with a white, luminous mist rising from the ground and surrounding him.

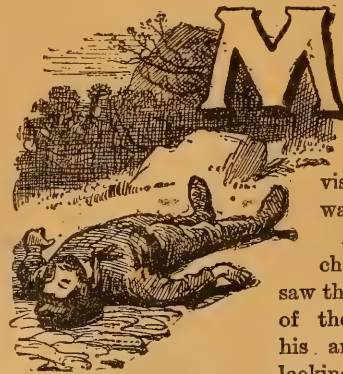
It enveloped him in its insidious folds, stifled his senses, and finally stretched him upon the ground as one dead.

The night was still, as the nights had been for a long time past, and the whole flooring around him remained in its phosphorescent state for hours. But it was not of that material, for the aroma it gave out was very pleasant to the nostrils, although the fallen man was unconscious of it. He simply lay as one sleeping, with the dim waves of light rolling over him.

In the morning Morse was up with the sun and on his way to the castle. On his arm was hung a coil of strong rope, intended to bind the limbs of the captive he had so strangely secured.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE PRISONER.



MORSE had improved upon his first invention of a soporific compound, and the condition of the visitor to the castle was the proof of it.

As the youthful chemist drew near, he saw the outstretched form of the man lying with his arms extended, and looking, as people say,

"as dead as mutton."

But Morse was not alarmed. He knew that the appearance of death only had followed his experiment. Without any feeling of apprehension he walked briskly up and gazed at the still face.

An exclamation of surprise escaped him. It was the smuggler Giuseppe!

He was the last man who had been in the thoughts of Morse, for he verily believed that he had left him buried beneath the ruins of the gate of the Dead City.

But it was clear that he had escaped, and he must have been the sole survivor, or assuredly he would never have visited the castle alone.

From the face to the feet of the man the eyes of the boy travelled by a natural transition, and then he saw something to account for the peculiar footmarks made on a previous visit by the smuggler.

They were heavily swathed in bandages, and the inference was clear. On that night when the gate was shattered from its sockets by the melinite improved by Morse, a portion of the ruins must have fallen upon Giuseppe's feet and injured them.

Possibly he had also been rendered insensible, and that would account for the complete silence on the part of the gang of smugglers following the explosion.

What that man must have suffered! Wounded and sore, he must have crawled through the forest on his way to find his friend Reonardo.

Halting here and there to rest or to dress his wounds, the time had lagged on heavily. At length, following the trail of Jim's party, he had found his way to the castle, and there halted, not knowing which way to go.

Morse could not quite understand why he lingered there. It might have been in search of food, for the wan cheeks of the smuggler told a terrible tale of privation.

Like Nebuchadnezzar of old, he must have lived as the beasts of the field, on roots, on grass—on anything available—just keeping body and soul together, and kept alive by the vitality of a strong constitution.

But there he was, anyhow, and Morse proceeded to bind his arms and legs ere he took measures to restore him to consciousness.

His prisoner secure, he went into the laboratory and got a small phial, from which he poured a few drops of thick, whitish liquid into the half-open mouth of the unconscious man. In a few moments its potency became apparent, for Giuseppe opened his eyes and stared heavily round.

He looked at Morse, and the light of recognition leapt into his face.

"Diablo!" he muttered. "*You*!"

"You seem to know me," said Morse, serenely.

A shudder passed through the form of the smuggler. He closed his eyes, murmuring:

"Not boys, but fiends."

"Are you the sole survivor of the party that came down the gate?"

"It is so," was the answer. "I alone live—if *this* is life."

Morse looked to the weapons that the man might possibly have about him. He found a knife and a revolver—the latter empty, for all the ammunition the

man possessed had been wasted in vain efforts to shoot something to subsist upon. Morse placed the weapons in his pocket.

"Before I know what is to be done with you," he said, "I must consult my friends."

"Spare my life," said Giuseppe, humbly; "it is all I ask. I give in. I confess I am defeated. You are too much for me."

"But what is to be done with you?" asked Morse.

"Say, is Reonardo on the island still?" inquired Giuseppe.

"No. We shot nearly all his men, and those that escaped have retreated."

"It was an accursed task he took in hand, and I told him so. You will spare my life?"

"We could not kill you in cold blood. Giuseppe, I learn that, in leaving, your friend left a boat behind him. It is yours. Swear, if we help you to escape by it, that you will molest us no more."

"I swear it, by the tomb of my mother!"

"I will trust you, as far as I am concerned," said Morse; "but, as I told you, I must consult my friends. For the present I must put you out of sight, in case anyone wanders this way."

It was a heavy task for the boy, but he succeeded in accomplishing it. Taking Giuseppe by the shoulders, he dragged him into the castle, across the courtyard into the council-chamber, and there, having seen to his bonds, to make sure they were secure, locked him in.

That done, he started for the school, proud of his success, more as a discovery of a complete anæsthetic than on account of the victory he had obtained over such a man as Giuseppe the smuggler.

His coming was looked for by a little knot of his confidants, who were awaiting him outside the school-house. He delighted them with the story of the capture of Giuseppe, but no decision was come to, owing to the temporary absence of Jim, who had, with Lal Brodie, gone up the lagoon in a boat for a deep-sea bathe.

Pending his return, nothing would be done beyond making arrangements to put together a small basket of food for Giuseppe, who sorely wanted it.

Romeo assisted them in this matter without being confided in as to whom it was intended for. It was laid aside, to be taken up after they had partaken of their own breakfasts.

Meanwhile, Jim and Lal Brodie had had an adventure of minor importance in some respects, but which calls for attention in the next chapter.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE WOMAN ON THE ROCKY BREAKWATER.



IN describing the island in the early part of our story we had occasion to mention that the rocky breakwater between the inner portion of the lagoon and the sea was almost one huge garden of natural flowers, arising from the fact that in every crevice were innumerable spaces where there was room for a rich natural soil to accumulate.

There were no such flowers on any other known portion of the island, and there was a very probable assumption that in the days when the ordinary inhabitants of the island lived there, they planted bulbs and seeds to give flowery splendour to the irregular ridge of rock and earth.

Now Jim knew that Eveline was very fond of flowers, and he designed that morning not only to bathe, but afterwards land on the shores of the natural garden, and gather her a bunch of lilies, that grew there in many varieties, and all of great beauty.

So he and Lal Brodie had their dip, and having dressed, they pulled the boat to the shore, and Jim landed.

Leaving his companion to look after the craft and await his return, he sauntered over the broken ground, plucking a flower here and there, until he had gathered what he deemed sufficient, and then climbed up to the summit of the rock to get a clearer view of the sea.

He had no set purpose in this, beyond getting what he always enjoyed—a look at the blue waters of the Mediterranean in the light of the morning. He soon espied a boat on the shore some distance higher up, with a woman sitting beside it. A second glance revealed to him that the woman was Lucia di Valo.

Jim had no liking for the fiery Spanish woman—or girl, as some people would call her—but she exercised a certain fascination over him, and he was impelled to go down to her.

The feeling that led him to her was of a twofold nature—a wish to speak to her again and a desire to know what had brought her thither.

She saw him coming ere he was half-way down, and beckoned to him with a motion of her hand. By this he knew that she was willing to have an interview with him, so he hurried on, and they were soon within a few feet, each eyeing the other curiously.

Jim raised his cap. There was no other greeting. Lucia kept her seat on the edge of the boat.

“Ha! you, young Gordon?” she said. “I ask for you in my heart, and you are here.”

“I suppose I ought to feel flattered,” replied Jim, in a quandary as to what he ought to say in response.

“No, it is not flattery,” she said. “I wish in my heart to see you, so that you may tell me what has become of Reonardo. He is pardoned, and they tell me that he was hiding on the island. I go to the bay, and he is not there. I see nothing but the old boat that was Giuseppe’s. Say, then, where is he?”

“Gone,” said Jim, briefly.

“How long?”

“Days ago.”

“Why did he leave?” impetuously demanded Lucia di Valo.

“Because he was obliged to,” said Jim. “Shall I tell you how it was?”

“If you can be so gracious.”

“I not only can be, but I will,” said Jim.

“Sit down,” said Lucia. “But stay. For whom are those flowers?”

“For Eveline Farrell.”

“Good boy. By saying that you answer a question that hung on my lips. Reonardo has not secured her?”

“Not yet,” replied Jim, drily, “and I will tell you the reason why.”

He was a good hand at condensing a story, and in a very short time put her in possession of all the facts in which Mr. Groby and Reonardo played the parts of plotter and counter-plotter.

The face of Lucia as she listened attentively was a study.

“It is good,” she said when it was concluded.

“One fool—two fools—— But how shall it be with you now that you have killed so many of his friends?”

“They sought their own end, and deserved their fate.”

“That is nothing. You kill a Spaniard, and do you think his people will consider whether he justly died or not? No. They will not forgive, but will wait their time and come here. You understand?”

“I feared that would be the case,” answered Jim, “but we may be in a position to receive them. They will not be welcomed with garlands of flowers.”

“Why do you not leave here?” asked Lucia. “Go away to your own country, where you will be safe. Think, if you lose your life—what then?”

“It will be lost,” said Jim, coolly.

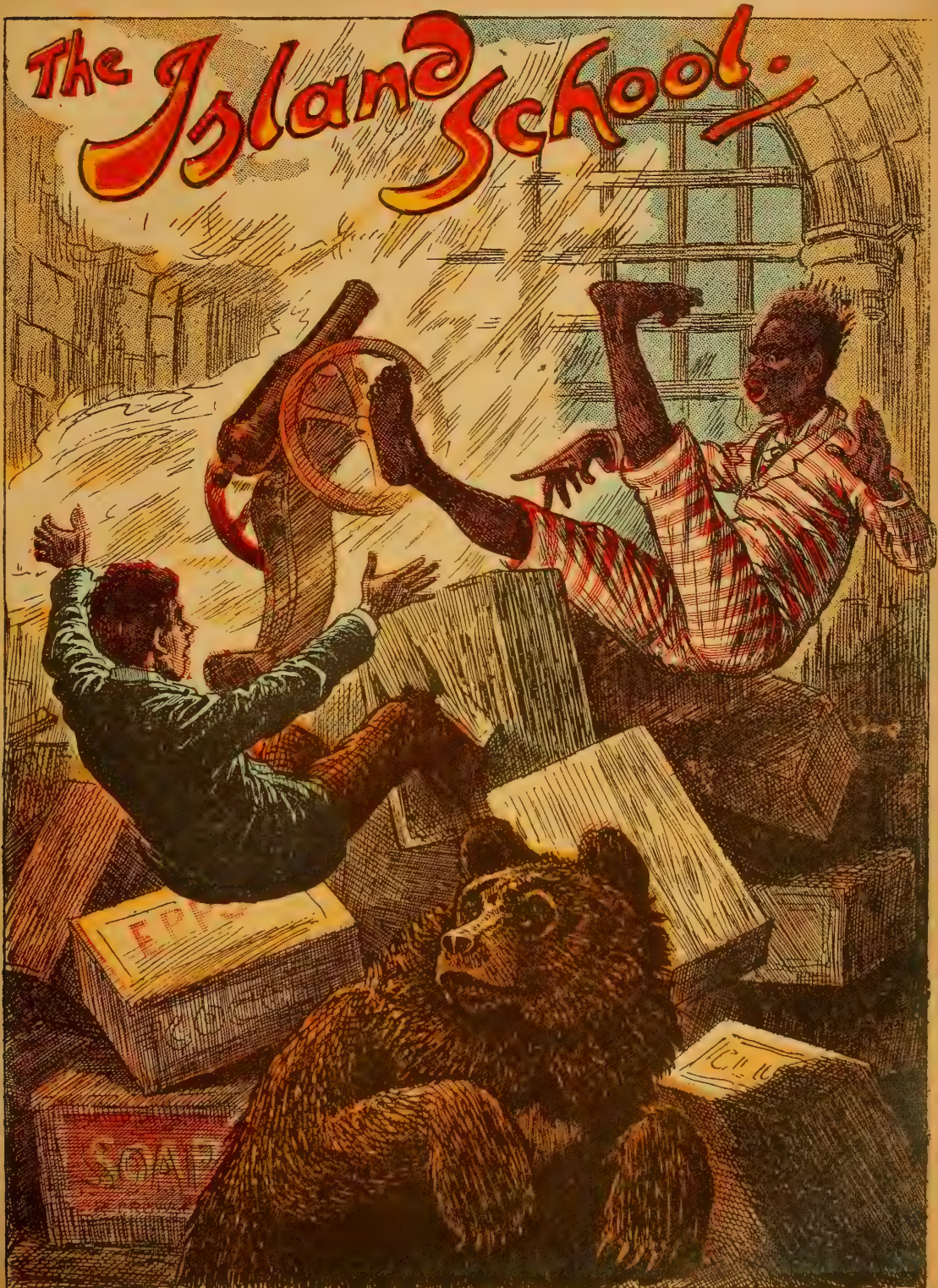
“A pity, surely—so promising—so much better than the many. Come, let me ask you to go?”

“There are a great number of us. How are we to get away?”

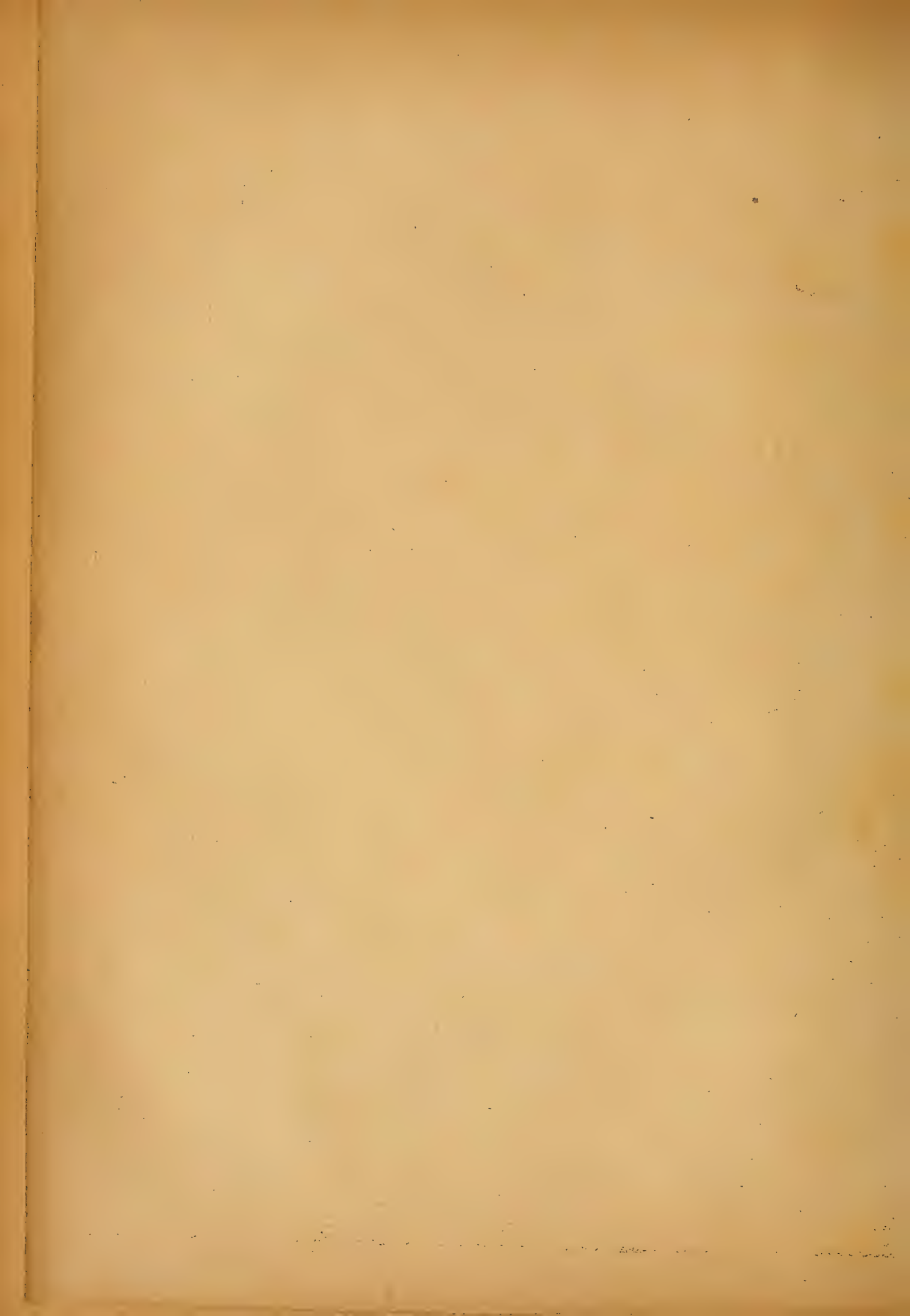
“Write—ask for a ship to be sent.”

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



Terry put a match to the touch-hole and shut his eyes. There was a moment's pause, then a roar as of an earthquake.



Jim smiled and shook his head.

"Ships do not come at a word," he said.

"But you have so many in your country. They are everywhere, too. The sea swarms with them. They are to be counted as the birds of the air. Surely one could be spared for you and all the mad fools of masters who sit over you."

"I cannot explain the difficulty to you," said Jim, rising, "even if I had the time, which I have not. You have given me a bit of advice. Please to accept a morsel from me in return. Go back to your island and your people and remain there. Think no more of that scamp Reonardo, but find, as you will easily do, one more worthy of your love."

It was a bit humorous for advice of that nature to come from one of the age of Jim, but Lucia accepted it in all seriousness. She looked thoughtfully upon the ground as she answered him.

"Easy to say go find another, still more easy for you to call him scamp, but a woman with one in her heart cannot think of another, and what cares she if he is a *rogue*? It is enough she loves him—especially with the Spaniard. Are you going?"

"I must," said Jim. "We are expected back."

"We?"

"I have a companion with the boat over yonder."

"Ah! so I forgot. This is not the main island. You will not speak of my being here?"

"Not if you wish me to be silent."

"Be silent, then, and adieu."

Jim raised his cap and hurried away, keeping as near as possible to the sea. He did not once venture to look back, for there was a curious feeling on him that if Lucia only bent her finger to him to return that he must go.

He could not account for it, as she in many ways had a repelling effect upon him. For all that he was obliged to admit that she was wonderfully pretty and very fascinating.

Lal was waiting impatiently for him, knowing that the time was short, and with a feeling of hunger calling him to hasten to the breakfast-table.

"I thought you were growing the flowers," he said.

"I picked the best I could find," replied Jim, as he leapt into the boat. "Pull away, old man, while I rearrange them."

"I wouldn't take all that trouble for forty girls," said Lal, pulling off the shore.

"It is a matter of taste," responded Jim, "and if these were for forty girls, none of them would accept a flower. Go on ahead. I hear the bell."

CHAPTER LXXVII.

GETTING GIUSEPPO AWAY.



REALLY, they are lovely," said Eveline, as Jim presented his bouquet to her in the hall. Lal Brodie hurried on to the dining-room,

where all the rest had assembled some minutes earlier.

"I am glad you like them, Evy," replied Jim. "If you wanted a cartload, they could be got for you. It is a lovely spot over there among the rocks."

"Strange to say, I have never been there."

"Is that a fact?"

"As if I would tell you anything that is not a fact!"

"I beg your pardon. Of course not."

"Jim, will you take me over there one day—with mamma, of course?"

"I could manage it better without Mrs. Farrell," said Jim, innocently; "she is so timid on the sea."

"Not for that short distance, Jim. Now, shall I tell her that you will take us?"

"I shall be delighted, naturally."

They lingered a little while longer and parted. Jim was pleased to think of the trip suggested, but he wished Mrs. Farrell could have been left out. Still, Eveline was right. Her mother would have to be of the party.

A hurried breakfast, and then a call together of the council to hear what Jim had to say about Giuseppe. He could see no other way of disposing of the man than by allowing him to go. Moreover, he would have to be assisted to his boat, which must be done after dark, to avoid attracting attention. Finally, it was seen that some provision would have to be made for him as to food and drink. He could not live on air during the many hours he would be at sea.

Jim and Morse undertook to carry out all that was necessary.

Twice during the day they went up to look at the prisoner, and Jim was of opinion on the second visit that he might have his arms and legs set free.

"The man is in a cowed and almost helpless condition," he said. "Really, I do not think he will make any attempt to escape."

Nor did he. The smuggler—for the time, anyway—was broken. He was as a child in the hands of the two boys, and wept as he ate his food, a strange spectacle to those who knew the natural ferocity of his nature.

Night came along, and at the last moment Romeo was made acquainted with the task they had in hand. He volunteered to go up to the castle and bring the smuggler down. Jim and Morse put some bread and fruit into a basket, and the other members of the council stole away one by one, to ease off the smuggler's boat, which was very lightly stranded on the quiet shore.

The basket was ready, and Jim and Morse were preparing to leave the house, when Romeo's voice was heard outside calling loudly for help.

The next moment there was a crashing of timber and a cry from another voice, presumably that of Giuseppe. Jim and his friend dashed out to prevent mischief, and they were just in time to see the smuggler hobble past with his eyes distended from his head with terror. Charley at the same moment disentangled himself from the ruins of his hut and came pounding along in the wake of the Spaniard.

The bear meant serious business, and by what freak of instinct he had known that the foe was going by was ever to remain a mystery. But he must have been aware of the passing of Giuseppe, and, urged on by his more ferocious instincts, have plunged against the side of his hut and, strongly-built as it was undoubtedly, brought the structure to the ground.

The Spaniard would have been a doomed man but for the intervention of Jim and Morse, who threw themselves between him and the furious bear. In the condition of his feet he never would have been able to get far away ere he fell into the clutches of the animal.

"Charley," shouted Jim, "quiet, boy!"

Morse, getting in front, waved his cap, and the bear pulled up with his tongue lolling out, looking very sheepish, if he did not feel so.

As there was invariably a collar round his neck, Jim laid hold of it and turned him away from a sight of the Spaniard, who, palsied with fright, had stopped short.

"Look to the man," whispered Jim to Morse, "and I will follow as soon as possible. Romeo, get the key of the woodshed—smart."

While Romeo went in search of it, Jim led Charley away in the opposite direction, and Morse assisted the terrified Giuseppe from the spot. But there was no more danger. Charley knew the voice of his keeper, and became as tractable as a child.

"I think, Romeo," said Jim, as he locked the door upon the animal, "that you had better remain here until I return, in case Charley should get another fit of ferocity. He will listen to you as well as to me."

"Not quite so well, Massa Gordon, but he listens well enough," replied Romeo

Jim lost no time in overtaking Morse and the smuggler, who had not covered half the ground to the bay, owing to the slow travelling of the latter.

"Ah, you—young friend," he said, "you speak just in time. Is the brute safe?"

"I think so," said Jim, "but I cannot warrant him. He seems to have a spite against you as a Spaniard."

"He has a devil in him. But you save my life, and it will not be forgotten."

"All I ask of you," said Jim, "is that you do not return to this island and that you do your best to keep others, bent on mischief, from coming, too."

"If I ever return," said Giuseppe, "it is not as a foe you will find me."

By the time they reached Silver Bay, the rest of the Council of Ten, who had preceded them, had succeeded in dislodging the boat from the shore.

It had been rather a heavy task, owing to the size of the smuggler's craft. They had likewise overhauled it, and found some biscuit and wine in the locker in the aft part of the ship.

Giuseppe, with the addition of such provisions as the boys had obtained for him, was well enough off for the voyage. He crept into the boat and they pushed it out into deeper water.

It was little more than a breath of air he had to aid him, but as soon as the big sail was hoisted the boat slowly paid off before it. The smuggler leant over the stern and bade them adieu.

"I shall not forget," he said, "where we would have killed, you save and help. It is enough. Adios!"

They waved their hands and turned homewards, discussing the probability of the Spaniard falsifying his word.

"You cannot trust one of the breed," said Hillyard. "Cruelty and treachery they number among their virtues."

"I cannot think all do so," said Jim. "Suppose now, you took a typical 'rough' of our own country, and judged us all by his characteristics, would that be fair?"

"No," they answered in chorus.

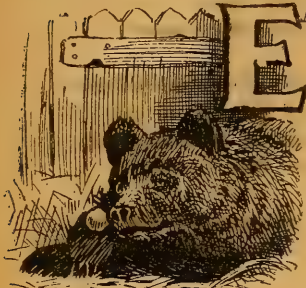
"Well, then, ere we condemn Giuseppe, let us see how he carries himself as a votary of gratitude."

On their return to the school they were met by Romeo, who reported that Charley had gone to sleep and was as pacific as ever. To all appearance, his escapade had caused no alarm in the house. Not a creature had come forth to inquire about it.

Easy in their minds thus far, they went in, and shortly after were in their beds and fast asleep.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE FORTS COMPLETED.—IN THE VINEYARD.



EARLY in the morning the boys were up and abroad to repair the damage done to the hut by Charley. He had made an almost total wreck of it. Three sides were more or less brought down, and the fourth was, as we know, the back of the post-office. The roof hung from it in a very disjointed condition.

"It must be made stronger next time," said Jim, ruefully.

Whether Mr. Farrell knew or not that something had gone wrong did not appear, for he did not come near the boys during the day, and by nightfall another hut was up, stronger in every way than the first. More buttresses were put up and the number of iron clamps trebled. Ganthony had a right to assume it was beyond Charley's strength to break through.

When brought out from the wood-house and led to his improved residence, Charley eyed it with a curious look that some declared was a smile, but he entered it without dissent, and curling himself up in a corner, feigned immediate repose.

"The old humbug!" whispered Jim. "See me wake him up!"

He brought an apple from his pocket and laid it against Charley's nose, but, beyond a slight dilatation of the nostrils, there was no visible sign that he was conscious of its neighbourhood.

Apples were to Charley what wine is to some men, flowers to women—practically irresistible. But he held out on this occasion, refusing, for some reason, to partake of the delicacy while the boys were there. As soon as they were outside, and the door secured, he seized it with avidity, gave it one scrunch, and swallowed it with a sigh of satisfaction.

He was dissatisfied with something or somebody, and we must assume that he was disappointed at not being allowed to give Giuseppe one of his hugs that so well sufficed for the Spaniard on the other side of the island. In short, Charley was in the sulks. But he was all right the next day, and the incident was seemingly forgotten by him.

The next three days were devoted to completing the forts and to making racks for the rifles, which, it was agreed, should be kept in the council-chamber. With a view to their additional security, Martin made two very strong locks, with suitable keys, which were added

to the existing means for keeping the door fast. The locks were fixed, and Jim took possession of the keys as president of the council. Morse undertook the making of the requisite ammunition, except the bullets, which were eventually cast in the blacksmith's shop.

Then the work on the farm and in the vineyard was resumed, and the life of the school settled into a calm, with only one remaining ripple on it, and that was the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Groby. It was thought that his illness had affected him mentally, and he had in consequence gone away into the wood, there to lose himself and perish miserably.

What else could they assume? It was a grievous thing, but he had lately lost much of the respect formerly entertained towards him, and the memory of his fate rapidly faded out of the minds of the boys.

One morning a startling announcement was posted up in the hall. Mr. Farrell intended to curtail the holidays by a week, and the school would therefore be resumed on Monday next. It was Thursday then, so that they had but three more days, and loud was the murmuring thereat. A meeting was held, but Jim counselled submission.

"After all, what is there for us to do?" he said. "On Saturday a mail-boat comes along, and we shall, many of us, get letters from home. That will be some compensation for us. I understand the guiding motive of Nap."

They asked him what it was, and he smilingly replied that, as it was only a guess, he had better not say anything more. Then the meeting broke up, having passed the resolution to accept the infringement of their rights for once, anyway.

It was in the afternoon, and Rainstone, calling his assistants together, set out for the vineyard. On the way thither he overtook Eveline, Mrs. Farrell, and the schoolmaster strolling along in that direction.

"Where are you going, Rainstone?" asked Mr. Farrell.

"To see to the vines," replied the boy, "and the other fruit. We have rather neglected them of late, and there must be a fine collection of weeds."

"Shall we go with him?" inquired the schoolmaster, addressing his wife.

"If Eveline pleases," was the answer.

"I do please," said Eveline; "we so rarely get so far from home."

They went on with Rainstone, followed by the little troop of boys with hoes for the smaller weeds, reaping-hooks to cut away those of larger growth, and baskets for fruit.

The vineyard, as it was called, was situated north of the school, and it embraced in its produce a great variety of fruit, including pears and plums, which were now ripening fast. At the upper end of the several

acres of ground given to fruit cultivation was quite a wood of these trees. The vines grew on a slope facing this wood, trailing about in the wildest luxuriance. There was any amount of work to be done in cutting away the useless wood, and the weeds were everywhere.

"It strikes me, Rainstone," said Mr. Farrell, "that there has been very little work done here lately."

"It wasn't possible, sir," replied the boy. "Look at the peril of coming here at all."

"Pooh!" exclaimed the schoolmaster, glancing around, and seeing that Eveline had gone on with her mother, "the danger has been nothing, save to those of a nervous temperament."

It was so like the man, now there was no apparent danger, to assume that there never had been any that he could recognise. Rainstone said he hoped there would be no more, and proceeded to set his little troop of labourers to work.

Eveline was looking for wild strawberries, of which there was a plentiful sprinkling about the place. In that sunny island they were almost as large as those we grow by cultivation at home.

Mrs. Farrell wandered on to the borders of the wood, and about a hundred yards divided her from her daughter, when, to her terror, a man rushed from the wood towards her.

He was attired as a Spaniard, save that, instead of the familiar round "pork-pie" hat, as it has been called, he had a gaudy handkerchief tied about his head. But the chief and most terrifying thing about the man was that he had a dagger or knife in his hand, raised threateningly as he dashed towards her.

A wild scream burst from her lips, and she turned to fly, but she was a poor runner at any time, and, impeded by her petticoats, she was in imminent danger of being speedily overtaken.

Eveline, hearing the cry, and observing the peril of her mother, and the boys also seeing the threatening stranger, dashed towards him with their gardening tools in their hands.

It would have all been up with poor Mrs. Farrell, notwithstanding these efforts on her behalf, for the would-be rescuers were too far off to give her prompt assistance, but for an accident that befell the Spanish ruffian.

He caught his foot in the roots of a loosely-trailing mass of garden weed and fell heavily. We say heavily, because he was for a few moments unable to rise, and Mrs. Farrell, utilising the short space of time, succeeded in reaching Eveline, on whose neck she fell sobbing.

The boys, seeing Mrs. Farrell so far safe, dashed past her with the object of capturing or punishing the would-be assassin, but he, recovering himself ere they could reach him, got upon his feet and, shaking his fist at them, beat a retreat.

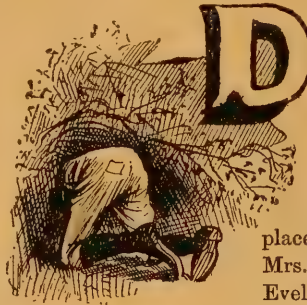
It was not to be expected the boys would follow him, as he might have had confederates or brother-assassins concealed among the trees. So they pulled up, and he, stopping on the borders of the wood, shook his gleaming knife in the air, and uttered something that sounded very much like a curse in Spanish. Then he vanished.

"This is a nice sort of thing!" exclaimed Rainstone, aghast. "As soon as we get rid of one crop of murderers another springs up, just like the weeds. Nobody's life is safe. Poor Mrs. Farrell—— Hallo! where is the bold Nap?"

They looked all over the vineyard, but could see nothing of him. The schoolmaster had disappeared.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

NAPOLEON AT HIS LOWEST.—NEWS OF THE ENEMY.



"DON'T give way, Mrs. Farrell," said Rainstone; "see how brave Eveline is. The rascal has cleared off."

"I can't live here in this murderous place any longer," sobbed Mrs. Farrell. "Thank you, Eveline, dear. You are a courageous girl; and as for the boys, they are young lions, and your papa——"

She stopped short, missing that valiant man, and gazed inquiringly at the boys.

"He has gone away, ma'am," replied one of them named Dibble—"for help, perhaps."

"He is an absolute coward," said Mrs. Farrell, "although I must confess I am no better; but when you see a man with eyes that stick out of his head with fury, and a long knife in his hands, rushing at you, it upsets one dreadfully."

There was no doubt about the shaking she had received, for she was still quaking all over, so Rainstone offered her an arm, and the boys, picking up their half-filled baskets and tools, fell in the rear as a bodyguard. Eveline walked on the other side of her mother, and in this order they left the vineyard and took the homeward road.

It was fringed with rugged rocks, honeycombed here and there with holes and small caves that might have given a hiding-place to one or more men, and the apprehensive glances of Mrs. Farrell led Rainstone to presently volunteer to go on a little ahead with a hoe in his hand, and see that there were no hidden enemies.

He had no fear of it himself, and he strode on, sticking the hoe into one hole after another without any result for a time. But when he had gone through this ceremony about a score times, he on thrusting in the hoe between two big stones covered on the top with trailing plants, extracted a loud "Oh!" from some person hidden there.

Mrs. Farrell screamed, and Eveline, startled, looked apprehensively about her until Rainstone, who had recognised the voice, called out:

"Don't be alarmed. It is only Mr. Farrell."

And the schoolmaster it was. In a mortal terror he had taken refuge, like a rabbit, in a hole. He, too, recognising a familiar voice, backed out; his place of retreat was so narrow that he could not come forth any other way, and, rising to his feet, endeavoured to appear dignified and calm.

But when a man is smothered in grit and has his hat off and his hair rumpled about his eyes, it takes a more imposing figure than Mr. Farrell could boast of to look majestic. In short, he looked ridiculous.

"Ahem!" he said, "have you ceased gardening for the day?"

"Yes, sir," replied Rainstone, with a curled lip. "Mrs. Farrell has been alarmed, and we thought it better that she should return home."

"Alarmed!" said Mr. Farrell, raising his eyebrows; "at what, may I ask?"

The question, coming from him, was exceedingly cool. For a moment nobody answered him. Then Mrs. Farrell spoke:

"Why do you try to hide your cowardice, Nap, by feigning ignorance? You saw that murderous wretch come out of the wood, and ran away."

"I did nothing of the sort," replied the schoolmaster, violently. "I merely left you to botanise. On my way here I fancied I saw a fine specimen of the *Japonica glorionsia* growing in that hole, and I was seeking it when Rainstone impertinently thrust in that hoe, and 'has, I believe, materially injured me. I do not believe that any of you saw a man."

"Dare you go back to the vineyard alone?" tartly inquired Mrs. Farrell.

"I dare," he answered, "but I do not intend to do so merely to gratify the idle whim of a woman."

So saying, he stalked on ahead; but ere he had gone far, the boys, unable to control themselves, burst out laughing. He turned upon them furiously, and, with a threatening gesture, told them "they should one and all suffer for their insolence," and resuming his way, soon got out of sight.

"And that man," murmured Eveline, in an undertone, "is my father."

Only Rainstone overheard her, and his heart was moved to pity for the girl. She assuredly felt the matter keenly.

Mr. Farrell, on his return to the school, further belied himself by giving the alarm that there was a murderous stranger on the island. This information he imparted to Jim Gordon, on whom he had more than once been compelled in the hour of danger to rely.

Jim cared nothing for the fears of Mr. Farrell, but he was deeply concerned when he heard the whole truth, with a few additions as to his own cool demeanour in the hour of peril from the school-master.

"I assure you, Gordon," he said, "that it was my unmoved demeanour alone that induced the fellow to fly."

Jim made no response, but seeing the party returning, he hastened towards them. Mrs. Farrell received him with effusion, and taking his arm, implored him to take measures for all to get away from the island.

"It is no use appealing to Mr. Farrell," she said, "he has quite lost his head. He ran away the moment my life was threatened."

"Gordon knows what papa is," said Eveline, quietly. "Do not add to our pain and shame by talking about it."

"I think it will be well if we *can* get away from the island," said Jim, thoughtfully, "but for a day or two I do not see how it can be done."

Eveline looked at him, and saw that by "a day or two" he meant something indefinite. It might be days, or weeks, or months ere they could hope to be able to leave the island, and it might be—never. That was the gravity of the position as he was obliged to view it, and Eveline read it as plainly on his face as if he had uttered the words aloud.

In sober truth there was a prospective renewal of the old trouble. The relatives of the men who had fallen on the island were on the path of vengeance. It was hardly possible that this one man could be alone; the boldness of the attempt on the life of Mrs. Farrell pointed to others being somewhere in the vicinity of the vineyard.

A true Spaniard may attempt assassination single-handed, but never in daylight. He believes in darkness as a cover.

Morse and some of the boys—among them, La' Brodie, Ganthonny, and Whiffer—had been for a stroll with Charley, the bear, and on their return they heard the story from Jim's lips. It created a profound impression upon all.

"I saw several feluccas cruising about," Morse said, "and wondered if they were of any concern to us. I fancy now that they are waiting a quiet chance of landing men, or, having done so, are hovering about, pending the result of their coming here."

"I don't quite understand you," said Jim.

"I mean," explained Morse, "that the probability is that, having landed a number of men—the feluccas

could very well have brought fifty or even more—they are standing off, awaiting the result of the attack that may be made upon us.”

“But this attempt at solitary assassination in the vineyard, how does that fit in with your ideas?”

“Possibly the attack on the school will be made from the direction of the vineyard. The fellow may have found the temptation to murder a woman, one of the hated usurpers, irresistible. Anyway, we must be on the alert.”

Jim said he would run up to the castle and have a look round. He would be back by tea-time. Before anyone could remonstrate with him, or offer to accompany him, he was off at a rattling pace, and speedily was out of sight.

CHAPTER LXXX.

A TIME OF SUSPENSE.—NEWLY-MADE GRAVES.



NO concealment of the attempted assassination was possible. Too many had shared in the adventure for it to be hidden from the other occupants of the school. Before tea-time it was all over the place. Furthermore, there was a considerable amount of exaggeration

a float, and fear was in the heart of many of the younger boys. Nor were the men without some sense of a tremor, for they were not all, like Martin, of the sturdy build that thinks nothing of a fight, and accepts hard knocks as one of the boons of existence.

The two undermasters received the news with outward calmness, but the effect on the trio of niggers was to make them wild with excitement, and in the case of the two elders with additional emotion, not unallied with alarm.

Romeo, having tasted the delights of exciting adventure, rose to the occasion, and commenced laying the table by shooting a column of plates along the floor, thereby cracking many and severing others asunder. Then he spilt a huge pile of bread-and-butter, and upset a tea-urn, inasmuch that his grandfather reproved him in a choice collection of epithets.

“It’s no use a-talkin’ to me,” replied Romeo, “dis chile got him blood up, and am on de war-trail. Ware ob dat, ole man. Don’t you screw me up to make you *de fust victim*. Clar out dere. Whoop!”

He bounded out of the dining-room, leaving his aged grandfather petrified with astonishment. In this state he remained until Hamlet appeared, burdened with sundry things for the table.

“Spec yo’ve done sumfin now,” said Macbeth, recovering his speech.

“What de marrer?” demanded Hamlet.

“Yo’ brought a lunatic inter de worle in de shape ob dat boy Romeo,” said Macbeth.

“S’pose me hab, den,” cried Hamlet, angrily, “*who de fust offender*? Who brought me inter de worle? Garn along and make youself useful by bringing in sumfin. Don’t take defuge in sham ole age.”

Macbeth was not proof against this style of argument, he feeling in his conscience that he was the really original culprit. Of course, if he had never had a son, that son could not have had another son, and so—he got so far in his line of thought, and then gave it up. It was no use his trying, in his then state of mind, to work out deep social and family problems.

Mr. Farrell sent word down that he was not coming in to tea, and the intelligence was borne with commendable fortitude. The room soon filled with an excited throng of boys and men. In the absence of Jim Gordon it really seemed as if there was nobody to act as a sedative to the excitement.

Morse was busy with his thoughts, and mechanically took his seat at the table without showing signs that he heard the babel of voices. The undermasters were powerless to obtain quietude, until Mr. Storeby rose up with his face blazing with wrath.

“Silence!” he cried. “What do you mean by making this uproar? Is it because you have not the master hand of Mr. Farrell to restrain you?”

There was no mistaking the sneer expressed in the words “master hand,” and there were derisive cries of “He isn’t our master!” and, “He is a coward!” and, “Who hid in the rabbit-hole?”

Morse sprang to his feet. “Boys, be quiet,” he said. “What is the use of falling foul of a man *not worth it*?”

There was a laugh, and then a stillness among the boys. The men at their table shuffled about uneasily in their seats, and whispered among themselves. Changeling was the calmest of them all, but Chorker was pea-green with fear. Martin got up and faced Mr. Storeby.

“It is no use blinking facts, sir,” he said. “There is something going to happen here, unless we act in a way to stop it. Mr. Groby is gone—goodness knows where—and Mr. Farrell might be anywhere for all the good he is. You stan... next on the list. Won’t you take the job of making defensive arrangements of the school in hand?”

“I am not competent,” was the reply. “I know nothing about fighting matters, especially against a foe who at present does not seem to me to have assumed a definite form. By nature I am a man of peace.”

“Well, Mr. Turner, then,” said Martin.

Mr. Turner shook his head in a melancholy fashion.

"I am a child in such things," he said.

"Then I make a proposition to all here, which I hope will be accepted," pursued Martin. "It isn't quite to my taste to be led by boys, but in this case we've got to do it. We must bend our necks to the yoke, because there is no help for it. There are two youngsters here who I think will confound our enemies' politics, and frustrate their knavish tricks, if you will only give them a free hand. Need I name 'em?"

There was a general cry from the boys of "Gordon and Morse," and Martin, smiling, waved his hand for silence.

"Them's the two," he said. "I think, if we are guided by them—" He stopped short. "I see Morse—where's Gordon?"

"He ought to have been here before now," said Morse. "He went up to the castle to look around."

"And here he is!" shouted a score voices, as Jim entered the room.

"What's the matter here?" he asked, gazing about him at the excited throng.

"You have been elected as one of our leaders to fight the foe," said Mr. Storeby, "but, as I said just now, he appears to be at present in rather an indefinite form."

"I will have a cup of tea first," replied Jim, "and then I will endeavour to show you that he is a palpable quantity. Pass the bread-and-butter, Morse. I'm hungry."

He speedily disposed of his tea, paying no apparent heed to the murmuring of the curious and the tremulous around him. The two undermasters were not the least apprehensive among the throng. As soon as Jim was ready to speak the three negroes glided in, and stood just within the room.

Romeo was the last to enter, and he left the door ajar. If Jim had been curious he could have ascertained that Eveline was outside, listening.

It was later than usual for the termination of the meal, and the sun was sinking. There was the halo of twilight on the landscape without, and when the voices of all became hushed, the stillness on the house was peculiarly impressive.

"I have little time for talking," said Jim, "and so that I may be heard by all, I will stand upon a seat. I know," he added, with a smile, as he mounted it, "that it is a breach of the rules, and punishable with confinement in the house for a day, but I must risk it. To come to the point—there are thirty, at least, of strange men on the island, and they are all armed."

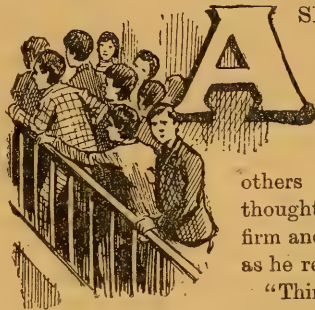
He stopped and looked round him to judge of the effect of his portentous communication. With the exception of an additional paleness in the cheeks of some, and a slight shifting of feet, there was no response.

"Thirty men," added Jim, impressively, "bent on mischief. They have come, in short, to avenge the death of the men we so justly killed.

"I went to the castle," he added, after a moment's rest, "to survey the country back and front. This way there was nothing to see, but in the rear of the castle I discovered some newly-made graves wherein these strangers have laid all that remains of their dead friends. So far I do not quarrel with what they have done. But over the graves they have placed a board on which is written in Spanish: '*Thou shalt be avenged.*'"

CHAPTER LXXXI.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE NIGHT ATTACK.—MORSE AGAIN TO THE FORE.



SHUDDER ran through the room. Scarcely one who listened to Jim could repress it. He himself was pale, for he had others besides himself in his thoughts, but his voice was firm and his manner composed as he resumed.

"Thirty men," he said, slowly, "determined-looking ruffians to the eye. But all these swarthy foreigners have a determined look not always confirmed by their conduct. When met with a bold front they, as a rule, cave in. That is all I need say to the smaller boys, who can have no share in what I think necessary to do to-night. For the present they had better retire to the class-rooms, and in a short time to the dormitories. All under fourteen years of age will please go at once."

Fully a third of the youngsters moved towards the door, which Romeo threw open. Eveline disappeared, and Jim gave the little fellows a few encouraging words as they passed out.

"Keep your peckers up," he said; "we shall knock the sand out of the ruffians. And you are not the boys to howl before you are hurt."

"We believe in you, Jim Gordon," they answered, "and we shall not make more fuss than we can help."

They gave him a cheer when they got into the hall, and then went clattering upstairs, assuming a courage the poor little chaps did not entirely feel. Some of them were not more than eleven years old and they put as bold a face as any on the position, which, to say the least, was trying to them.

Jim now bade the negroes clear the table as expeditiously as possible, and, while they were thus engaged, he walked up to the two junior masters, and had a word with them.

"Unfortunately," he said, "the arms we ought to have had here are in the castle. There is no time to obtain them, and a general upward movement would, at present, bring the enemy upon us. The only thing that can be done is to arm yourselves with such weapons as the house and workshops afford, and, when night comes on, barricade the doors. Morse and myself, who will go out as scouts, will give you a timely notice of the approach of the foe."

"Gordon," said Mr. Storeby, "Mr. Farrell ought to be consulted, and he may devise some mode of action that will ensure our safety."

"You may consult him, if you care to," replied Jim, "but I know him too well to think that he will be of any assistance. I must now have a word with the men."

As he crossed over to them, Mr. Storeby had a few hasty words with Mr. Turner, and the pair hurried from the room. They had a faint hope Mr. Farrell might serve them, and were bent on interviewing him. The result of their mission will presently be seen.

Martin, Truebury, Sleery, Pastern, Waffle, and Changeling were standing ready to hear what Jim had to say. Chorker kept his seat with a hand over his mouth to hide his quivering lips.

"Get all the things that will serve as means of defence from the workshops, and bring them here. Iron bars, tools of your trades, anything that will be of help. They may not be wanted, but, in any case, they will be safer here."

He told them, as he had informed the undermasters, that he and Morse would be out as scouts, and he furthermore said that the men were in hiding in some scrub growing among the rocks half-way on the road to the vineyard.

"They were gathering when I went to the castle, and I waited until I could see by their demeanour that all had assembled. It is certain that their object is to attack us to-night."

"We haven't more than an hour," said Martin, "before it will be getting dark."

"It is enough," returned Jim, "if you make good use of the time."

He left them, and went back to the boys, who had remained in the room. He cast a quick glance over them, and was glad to see that they all looked resolute, and were wonderfully composed.

"You will have to be divided into parties," he said, "so as to defend different portions of the house against possible attack. Your better way will be to think as soldiers do, that *all* depends on the way you do your especial duty."

He then divided them into groups, making eight in all, and each commanded by one of the remaining members of the Council of Ten.

By the time he had done this, Martin and the men, Chorker excepted, were bringing in all sorts of things that might serve as a means of defence.

There were iron bars, hammers of various sizes, big chisels, and other carpenter's tools, stout cudgels, and even the awls and other things used by the shoemakers.

They were thrown upon the floor, and each boy was allowed to select the weapon he thought he could handle best.

While Jim was superintending this work Romeo came in with a slip of paper in his hand. He handed it to Jim, saying, "From Marse Morse."

"Where is he?" asked Jim, hurriedly.

"Gone out, sar."

Jim opened the paper, and, casting his eye over it, read with something akin to dismay:

"Have gone to the castle. Want something from it particularly. Wait for me by Charley's house, but don't let the animal out until you see me."

"Awfully risky," muttered Jim; "but I must give him credit for knowing what he is about."

Then he went on with his work, counselling the boys how to act, and giving special directions to those appointed to act as their leaders. Knowing the weak points in the house, he recommended an immediate barricading of the scullery window and other places at the back. In the front the windows were better protected.

"Nap's iron bars," he said, "will serve us after all. We may thank him for having them fixed, although I never thought I should have to do so by choice."

The divided bodies marched off to their respective destinations, and Jim then addressed the men, who were waiting for instructions.

"Your place," he said, "will be in the hall by the front door. As soon as I am gone, you will not allow anyone to go out or come in without hearing from me. This order will hold good until eleven o'clock. If I am not back by that time, you may reckon I am in trouble, and you, Martin, will be in command. Do what you think is right, according to your judgment, to save Mrs. and"—he paused a moment—"Miss Farrell. As a last resource, if you could get them to a boat, and away to sea, it would be something. Better be drowned there than fall into the hands of the ruffians I have seen to-day. The boys"—he stopped again—"will, I fear, have to look after themselves. But they might do worse, and if as many of them as can will get away and adopt the same expedient, there is a possibility of their being picked up at sea."

His face was illumined with the light of the heroism that, in the old days of sieges and forlorn hopes, was to be seen on the faces of those who led the van in the attack upon the battlements of the foe, and whose

fate was almost certain. He was as one going to the death, perhaps, so that others might live.

They could not understand it as a body, but Martin knew what was in his brave young heart, and he wrung Jim's hand with silent fervour, that was more potent than mere words.

"I must now," said Jim, "pay a short visit to Mrs. Farrell and her daughter, and after that my place is outside."

He now observed for the first time that Chorker was not among the men, and he was about to ask where he was, when it flashed upon him that he had little time to spare, and Chorker, anyway, was not of much account, so without referring to the absence of the man, he left the room.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

EVELINE AND JIM.—A LAST LOOK ROUND.—THE
COMING OF NIGHT.



BEFORE Jim could reach the private room of Mrs. Farrell he was intercepted by Romeo, who was evidently on the lookout for him.

"Miss Eveline in the linen-room, Marse Gordon," he whispered; "want to see you 'tickler. Marse Gordon, you know me, and me know you. If you go out to-night, why not take me?"

"You may come if you like," replied Jim, after a moment's reflection. It occurred to him that Romeo might be of service.

"Fader and grandfader," whispered Romeo, "am all ob a jelly in de kitchen. Dey be easy made into blank mange."

"Do not laugh at your aged friends," said Jim, attempting to look severe; but he could not help responding in part to Romeo's grin of delight.

The linen-room was upstairs at the back, a barren apartment, save for the cupboards in which the linen was kept. Eveline was waiting for Jim, very quiet but pale, and with a redness about the eyes that showed she had been weeping.

"Jim," she said, "I overheard all you said to the men and boys. Tell me what I ought to do."

"Keep with Mrs. Farrell, and do not let her be more alarmed than you can help. If Martin should come to you, or send, later in the evening, be guided by what he says ought to be done."

"And where will you be?" asked Eveline.

"Oh, I," said Jim, lightly, "will be skulking outside, watching the movements of those blackguards. Morse and Romeo will be with me. I shall be all right."

"You say that so that my mind may be at rest, Jim."

"And what good purpose would be served by my disturbing you, Eveline?"

"None," she said, thoughtfully, "and you need not worry about me. You won't, will you?"

"Not if I can help it. By the way, what has become of Mr. Farrell?"

"He was in his room a short time ago with Mr. Turner and Mr. Storeby."

"Holding a council of war, perhaps," said Jim, with a smile. "Well, for the present, good-bye, Eveline."

"Say *au revoir*," she answered; "it does not sound so much like parting—for a long while—as good-bye."

Jim shifted his adieu to the desired point of the parting compass, and hurried off. The sun was gone, and in a few minutes the night would be fully there. Then he would have to be abroad, awaiting the return of Morse. First of all he went below, and entered the kitchen. Seeing nobody there, he was passing through, when he heard a slight scuffling in an adjoining cupboard, and a muffled voice exclaimed:

"Keep you woolly head out ob de way, dar."

"Dis chile see as well as you," returned another voice. "It am only Marse Gordon. You needn't pray for marcy yet."

Jim walked to the cupboard and threw open the door. Packed among candles and other unpalatable groceries, he saw Macbeth and Hamlet. They stared at him with a ludicrous attempt to appear at ease.

"Why are you there?" asked Jim.

"We was jus'—jus'," said Macbeth, hesitating, "jus' counting up *dé groceries*."

"Dere am two candles short," added Hamlet, following up the cue of his aged father.

"Come out," said Jim, "and make yourself useful in some way. Romeo sets you a good example. Where did he get his pluck from?"

"We was allus a brave fambly," said Macbeth, sliding feet first out of the cupboard; "but now it am time for me to retire from de battle-field."

"Me was jus' lookin' after dis pore ole man," asserted Hamlet; "fleral duty afore eberything."

"You will find the kitchen chimney safer," said Jim, drily; "as we burn wood here, you will not spoil your complexions with soot."

He walked into the scullery, where Hillyard was in command. The window had just been barricaded up, and, with tables and other things, looked strong enough to withstand the shock of a cannon-ball.

Jim examined the work, and having approved of it,

went on to a lumber-room at the side of the house. There were three windows in it, but all were protected with iron bars. The boys in the room were lounging about, chatting, in a state of suppressed excitement.

He gave them a few stimulating words of encouragement, and left them. So he went from post to post—to the class-rooms and the dormitories—until he had visited them all, and gathering as he went that, boys though they were, they would give a good account of themselves ere they yielded to the enemy.

Satisfied so far, he hastened to the hall, where he found Martin railing at the absence of Chorker, who had vanished out of the house without anyone knowing whither he had gone.

"I'll drown the old skunk like a rat, when I get hold of him," he said.

"Don't," pleaded Changeling; "jest leave him to me. I can make it all right with Chorker."

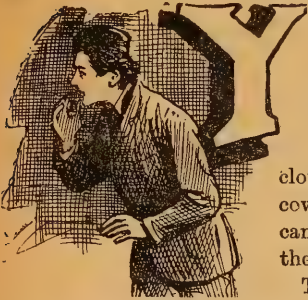
"I am going now," said Jim, "and it has occurred to me that no lights had better be burning in the house. Please send word round to that effect."

Martin promised to do so, and, in obedience to a sign from Jim, opened the door, and the brave lad passed out of the house into the night.

"It has grown dark all of a sudden," muttered Martin; "the sky is covered with cloud. It looks as if we are going to have a storm."

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

ROMEO LETS OUT CHARLEY.—A CHANCE OF THWARTING THE SPANIARDS.



YES, it was very dark. Jim was not at all prepared to find it so. Half an hour before, the sky was seemingly without a cloud, and now it was covered with a dense canopy that entirely hid the stars from view.

There was no wind, either, which showed that the currents that had brought the clouds were above. Accustomed though he was to still nights on the island, Jim experienced the feeling that this was especially so. There was something unnatural about it.

"If I were a poet," murmured Jim, "I might possibly think that all sweet Nature was breathlessly waiting the issue of the struggle to-night. But I am not one of those people who think that my affairs are of any special interest to the elements."

"Dat you, Marse Gordon?"

"Yes."

It was Romeo, who had previously stolen out and was awaiting him in the shadow, if there was such a special thing just then, of the house. But all around was of such a common blackness that light and shade did not apparently exist, even in a degree.

"Nuffin' stirring yet, Marse Gordon," said Romeo, sidling up, "'cept sumfin' like a sneeze from somewhar up de hill."

"You have seen nothing of Morse, then?" said Jim. "I am sorry for that. We may not be able to effect a meeting on such a night as this."

Something cold touched Jim's hand. He started back involuntarily.

"It am only Charley," said Romeo.

"I did not intend him to be loose," said Jim; "he had better be put up again."

Romeo endeavoured to lead Charley back to his den, but the passive resistance of the beast effectually foiled him. Charley simply sat down upon his haunches, and he became about as movable as a well-rooted tree.

Jim patted the beast, and in soothing terms desired him "to go home"; but the bear was not to be induced to stir. Nor was an angry word more effective, and finally he was allowed to have his own way.

"Let him fall in behind," said Jim. "Set him free."

Romeo took off the chain by which he had been leading Charley, and with the faithfulness of a well-broken dog, the intelligent brute fell to the rear. He became at once as tractable as a setter in the field.

As time was getting on, and Jim's anxiety about Morse deepening, they started for the path leading to the castle; but the darkness was so intense, and with no light from the house to indicate the exact line they should take, the way was very uncertain to Jim and Romeo.

Suddenly they found themselves close upon the sea, which, like the air, was strangely still. The faint sound of its lazily rolling in was the first indication Jim had of its vicinity.

"Hang it, Romeo!" he muttered, "we have come ever so far out of our way."

"No wonder at dat," said Romeo. "Dis night bout de darkest me was eber able not to see 'bout in."

"The question is, where are we?" said Jim. "I should think we must be about opposite the path, and if we walk up direct from the sea we shall come to it."

"'Spect dat 'bout it," said Romeo, easily.

"Anyhow," rejoined Jim, "we cannot be far out of the road if we can keep on straight from the sea."

He wheeled about, and getting his back square to-

the lagoon, started off, with Romeo close to his side, and Charley following behind with muffled tread.

Suddenly the bear gave a low grunt and bore away to the right.

"Come here!" said Jim, in a repressed tone of voice.

Charley grunted again, and kept on his way, forging slightly ahead. Jim could tell where he was by his muffled tread.

Jim dashed forward at the risk of colliding with something, for there were trees and boulders of rock scattered about, but a score of steps failed to bring him up with Charley.

"Confound him!" said Jim, "let him go."

"Who is it?" asked a quiet voice a short distance away.

"Morse, by jingo!" exclaimed Jim, delightedly. "Here we are, old fellow!"

"Who are 'we'?"

"Myself, Romeo, and Charley."

Morse came towards them, and when he was close up could be dimly seen with the bear by his side.

"How is it that you are not alone, Jim?"

The inquiry was answered satisfactorily, and then Morse asked:

"But what are you doing here?"

"I was going to the path to meet you, and if you were not there, to make my way up to the castle. I was afraid something had happened to you."

"You are not far from it," said Morse, calmly; "and thank your lucky stars you have Charley with you."

"Why?"

"Because it was my hearing him snort that stopped me on my way to the house."

"Then we should have missed each other."

"It would have been a long miss, I fear," said Morse, gravely. "Jim, I have laid a trap for the foremost of our enemies who come down by the path. It took me some time to arrange."

"What is it? Have you been digging a pit?"

"I have placed a cord across, about ten yards from the bottom."

"Somebody will have an awkward tumble."

"No, he will rise in the air, Jim. At the end of that cord—or near the end, to be more correct—there is a match with a piece of emery-paper under it. When the cord is dragged forward—as it will be as soon as anyone thrusts his foot against it—the match will ignite. Under the match there is some fulminating powder also, and near that some of my latest invention. I don't like doing it"—his tremulous voice bore witness of his truth—"but they bring it on themselves, and if we consider what they will do if they get into the schoolhouse—"

"Do not harass yourself with thoughts about such

wretches," interposed Jim. "They are the aggressors; in a sense, also, they are the strong and we are the weak. Will it destroy them all?"

"No," answered Morse, "and it may be not more than two or three. It is the moral effect of the thing I look to. If they can be sufficiently inspired with terror they may go away and leave us in peace."

"I am not sure that any form of moral effect will suffice," said Jim. "What do you propose to do?"

"We ought to be getting back to the house. I see you have arranged for it to be in darkness."

"I thought it better so."

"Quite right. They must have no guide in case they come *another way*."

"Do you think it possible?" Jim exclaimed, aghast.

"Well," said Morse, "you know my way of arranging for contingencies. It is possible they may come by a different route. The night is beastly dark—a little darker than I want it to be."

"How do you account for it?"

"I cannot, unless some great atmospheric disturbance is pending."

Again Charley stood them in good stead.

He seemed to know whither they wished to go, and his instincts or keener sight enabled him to guide them back to the schoolhouse. On arriving there they paused by the principal entrance and waited for a few moments.

Inside they fancied they could hear slight sounds of people moving to and fro, but no voices, and the command to have no lights had been religiously obeyed.

As waiting created a feeling of impatience in the breast of Jim, who was for strolling in the expected direction the coming foe would take, Morse assented to their going as far as the end of the workshops.

"But no further," he said, "in case we lose our way. We may be wanted here."

At the end of the row of buildings devoted to trade learning, the reader will remember, was the old laboratory once occupied by Morse. It was now turned into a store-room for odd material, and the door was not fast.

Morse pushed it open, and they took up a position near the portal, with Charley inside, and again there was a time of waiting and suspense.

There we must leave them for a few moments to see what became of Chorker, and two or three other bold spirits figuring in our story.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

INTENDING FLIGHT.—COMPANIONS IN FEAR.—CALCULATIONS UPSET.



CHORKER, on hearing of the peril of the school being attacked, turned his thoughts to the preservation of number one. It was natural he should do so, as all his sympathies were confined to his own good and ill fortune, and he was sure that, if the Spaniards really attacked the place, all therein were as good as done for.

The point for him to consider, then, was what could he do for his own safety?

His mind immediately turned in the direction Jim had chosen as the way for Eveline and her mother as a final hope of escape—the sea.

There were only the boats, it is true; but being safe in a boat at sea was better than running the risk of becoming unpleasantly acquainted with the knife of a Spaniard. So to sea he resolved to go.

Taking advantage of the general excitement in the dining-room, he slipped away and hid himself in the post-office, while daylight lasted. He dared not run the risk of being seen getting a boat ready for his especial safety.

He remained there until it was getting dusk, and then was considerably perturbed by hearing approaching footsteps, apparently of a stealthy nature.

He made for the inner room and got under the sorting-table, where he lay close.

The door opened and three men came in. He knew there were that number by the footsteps, and presently three voices were heard. They were those of the schoolmaster and his two assistants.

By their subdued conversation Chorker ascertained that they had been holding a conference and decided to take a similar step to that which he had meditated doing. In short, the valiant three, with a due regard to their own safety, were bent on running away to sea.

"I cannot see," said Mr. Farrell, "that by remaining here we could be of the least service to any of our poor people. It is certain they will be exterminated, and if we shared the same fate there would not be the slightest chance of the truth being made known and the culprits brought to justice."

"Certainly not," responded the other two.

"For my part," continued the schoolmaster,

"though I cannot but deeply deplore the fate of my wife and child, I must say they have in a measure brought it on themselves by undutiful conduct towards myself."

"It is a pity Eveline has to be left behind," said Mr. Storeby; "my heart aches for her."

"Does it?" said Mr. Farrell, sharply, "and why?"

"Well, sir," said Mr. Storeby, "in our present position I think I may candidly admit that I am deeply attached to her."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir, and under happier circumstances I might have aspired to her hand."

"It would have been like your infernal impertinence!" said Mr. Farrell, hotly. "Confound you! how dare you think of such a thing?"

"Pardon me, sir," said Mr. Storeby, "but I thought there was no harm in mentioning it *now*."

Mr. Farrell muttered something Chorker could not catch, and there was a silence which he thought it wise to break. On reflection, he decided it would be as well to have companions at sea. Misery, when shared by many, becomes, like sorrow, much lighter.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, rising up and putting his head out.

"Save us!" cried Mr. Farrell, making blindly for the door, "who is that?"

"Chorker, sir."

Mr. Farrell pulled up, coughed, and asked what he meant by hiding there to play the spy.

Chorker explained matters, and as the darkness deepened the four cowards quietly talked over their plans. They were very simple—to go to sea and there take the chances of being picked up by a passing sailing vessel or steamer.

One thing they would have to contend with—the want of food; for none of the four had been able to obtain so much as a biscuit without running the risk of their intentions being suspected.

At length it was quite dark, and they stole out of the post-office and crept down to the shore. They commented on the extraordinary gloom of the night, and Chorker said it was owing perhaps to "old Vesuvius having taken it into his head to blow off a bit"; but Mr. Farrell said that if that were so the eruption must be of the most violent description.

They found one of the larger boats and managed to launch her, and, after a tumble into the sea on the part of Mr. Farrell and Storeby, got on board. Chorker took the oars, and the helm was left to itself, as nobody could see which way to steer.

But Chorker declared he knew "the run of the lagoon," and he managed to get into the narrower part, where he pulled steadily for awhile, until the boat was suddenly brought up with a jerk that shook the rest of the passengers together like beans in a bag.

"What are you doing, you idiot?" roared Mr. Farrell.

"Idiot yourself!" replied Chorker. "I'd got my back to the land, hadn't I? If anybody ought to have seen the shore, it was you."

They wrangled for awhile, exchanging compliments that fully met the occasion. Then Chorker got out and began to growl again.

"Here's a bit of land to run agin," he said—"all pointed rocks, and I'll bet we've knocked a hole as big as your blessed head in the bottom of the boat."

And so it proved.

On attempting to float the boat again they heard the gurgling of the water as it forced its way through the hole made by the sudden rush on the shore. It was as big as a cricket-ball, and any attempt to successfully stop it would be futile. Until the boat had been properly repaired it would be madness to go to sea in it.

"I reckons," said Chorker, "that we've landed on the line of rocks on the sea side of the lagoon. A very purty place, but with nuthin' to eat, anything but comfortable. As you did afore, Mr. Farrell, you've brought your pigs to a very pretty market. We've got to stay here till daylight—blow you!"

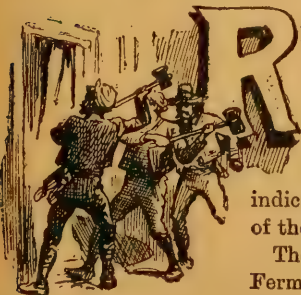
Mr. Farrell sat down and groaned aloud.

"Am I never to get away from this accursed island?"

The under masters assisted him in groaning, and Chorker anathematised the lot as being instrumental in landing him where he was. Finally they all became silent, lying huddled up on the rocks, and brooding over the consequences of being discovered there in the morning.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.—THE ATTACK ON THE SCHOOLHOUSE.—A DIVERSION.



RETURNING to Jim and his companions, we find them still in the almost impenetrable gloom, anxiously awaiting indications of the advance of the enemy.

The night was against the Fermenterian Spaniards, but in one respect it may be considered favourable. They could, if they were sure of their way, approach the schoolhouse unperceived.

"I wonder if they have given up the idea of attacking?" said Jim, after a very long waiting. "This is getting tedious."

"They will, of course, be slower than they would on ordinary occasions," said Morse, "having to grope their way."

"Dere sumfin' mobing 'bout somewhar," said Romeo. "Here, you, Charley, jes' you keep back a minute."

Charley was, in a gentle way, trying to push his body out, but on a word from Jim the brute retired again. Romeo stepped into the open, and the rest remained quite still. Charley was perhaps the stillest of the three.

"Whar it am me not able to say," said Romeo; "but dere am footsteps on de soft sand, and not so far away."

Crash!

It was a blow dealt upon the woodwork, and the implement used must have been a heavy one.

It was followed by the shouting of men and more thundering sounds, as of beating in a door.

"Jim," cried Morse, aghast, "we have been taken in. *They have come up the other way!*"

"Impossible," said Jim. "They had not the time to work round. But I see it all. There are two parties. It is the front door of the school they are hammering at."

"Wait a moment," said Morse.

He rushed out, and a moment later was seen to light something which he threw away from him. Shortly afterwards it blazed up, throwing a lurid light around.

Then their worst fears were realised.

Fully a score of men, of the type they were now familiar with, were engaged in battering at the door.

Some had rifles in their hands, but, for the most part, they seemed to be simply armed with knives. Two men in front, engaged upon the door, wielded heavy hammers.

It could only be a matter of a very short time ere that door yielded unless some diversion was created. Neither Jim nor Romeo had arms fitted for the work, but Morse was possessed of some of his favourite means of creating confusion among the enemy.

The blazing light died out quickly, but it evidently astonished the Spaniards, who paused in their labours and held a hurried consultation.

While they were thus engaged Morse crept up closer, and taking a small packet from his pocket, threw it into the thick of them.

In front of the door there was a square of flag-stones on which the packet fell. Morse had calculated on this, and, as he expected, the packet was soon trodden on as they moved about. It exploded with the sound of an old-fashioned mortar-bomb, and the Spaniards, hoarsely crying out to each other in alarm, staggered back, leaving two of their number prostrate on the stone flags.

"At them, Charley!" cried Jim, suddenly inspired with the notion that the bear would do all that was now required.

Like a dog set upon a stranger, Charley went for the foe, and although he could not be seen, a scream of terror soon told the story of one of the enemy being in his clutches.

Then came a roar from the region of the castle path, and the air for a moment was livid with a bluish flame.

"Party number two!" cried Morse.

A series of shouts of rage and terror was borne towards them, while from the region of the school there was tumult of voices. Alarm, no doubt, had taken possession of the inmates.

"They don't understand what has happened," thought Jim. "I must manage to get near and calm them down. Morse, can you light up again?"

"A score times, if necessary," was the answer.

Once again he lit up the landscape, and Jim, seeing that the main body of the attacking party had fled from the doorway, hastened in that direction. The two men prostrate there lay as dead.

The light died away once more, and darkness had come again as he sprang over the fallen men and reached the door. A big hole had been knocked in it.

"Martin!" he cried.

Before an answer could be given him, one of the supposed dead men clutched him by the leg.

"Light up, Morse," he cried.

For the third time the active Morse lighted up, showing the wounded Spaniard, who had laid hold of Jim, in a half-risen position, in the act of striking him in the abdomen with a dagger.

Jim saw his peril and grasped the wrist of the man, thus saving his life. From within came an answering cry from Martin, and the sturdy blacksmith, throwing open the door, came to Jim's assistance.

The wounded man was made a prisoner, his weapons being taken from him and his arms bound. They took him into the hall, and Jim and his friends followed.

A hasty consultation was held, and they decided to barricade the door, and, if attacked, defend the house as well as they were able throughout the night.

There was, however, Charley to be thought of, but he speedily released them from all anxiety on his account by returning and scratching at the door.

They let him in, and he showed by his gait that he had done something he personally approved of. He could put on a swagger on occasion as well as any human being.

Once more the door was closed and barricaded, a light being obtained for the purpose. Jim then inquired if the other boys had kept their posts. He was answered in the affirmative.

They had obeyed orders with the strictness of soldiers, and he paid them a visit to express his approval of their conduct.

As there was no good purpose to serve by keeping the house longer in the dark, lights were permitted, but Jim counselled them all to keep from the line of fire through the windows. He was not by any means sure that the enemy had been entirely beaten off. Having performed his public duty, he turned his attention to Mrs. Farrell and, of course, Eveline. They were in the latter's room, and Mrs. Farrell, alarmed by the sounds of combat, had sunk into a collapsed state of body.

She was weeping when Jim, in response to a knock, was desired to enter by Eveline; but the simple presence of the boy helped her to rally.

"I heard them saying you had gone away," she said, "and as Mr. Farrell has been mean enough to desert us again, I really gave ourselves up for lost."

"All the three masters—the *head men* of the house," said Eveline, scornfully—"have fled like frightened birds."

"They will have some difficulty in getting away from the island," said Jim. "It is to be hoped they will not come across the enemy."

"It will serve them right if they do," replied Mrs. Farrell, vehemently. "Not that I wish them to be killed, but if they were—were bastinadoed, as they do culprits in Turkey, I should be delighted."

"Spaniards do not use the bastinado," said Jim.

"Are we likely to be attacked again to-night?" asked Eveline.

"I hope not," said Jim; "but I cannot tell. Indeed——"

He stopped short, for at that moment there broke in upon them the report of a firearm from the outside, accompanied by the crashing of glass in the direction of the front hall.

Mrs. Farrell uttered a scream, and, springing up, seized Jim's arm.

"Oh, save us!" she cried.

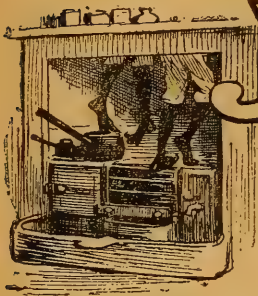
"Don't be alarmed," said Jim; "this is nothing more than I feared would be done. The bare fact that they have fired through the window shows that they have not the courage to attack the house again. All we have to do is to keep out of the line of the shots, and we shall be perfectly safe."

He added a few additional comforting words, and seeing Mrs. Farrell getting more composed, he took leave of them for the night.

"Get as much sleep as you can," were his parting words. "Should there be any real danger, and we be obliged to flee from here, you will have ample notice of it. But I think I may say that, with the exception of a repetition of futile firing, we shall be left at peace."

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

MISSING RELATIVES.—A NIGHT OF UNREST.



JIM did not feel comfortable over the indication of the near presence of the foe. Whatever losses they might have experienced it was clear that they were not entirely beaten off. Additional proof of it was given by another shot being fired as he was going downstairs.

This time it was fired at the door, and he heard it strike the woodwork with terrific force. At the foot of the stairs he saw Martin and the men seated by the wall on either side of the door through which the bullet had penetrated and flattened itself against the opposite wall.

Morse was with the men, and when Jim appeared he motioned for him to be careful how he crossed the hall.

"There are a lot of them outside," he said. "Somehow they have screwed up their courage to return. I fancy they must be rather short of ammunition, or they would make freer use of it."

He explained that he had got at an idea of their numbers by the murmuring of voices and sounds of movement outside.

"You may hear them," he said, "by placing your ear to the keyhole. But, as it is risky, you may take my word for it."

Jim, however, preferred hearing for himself, and notwithstanding the whispered expostulation of Martin, he listened as Morse had evidently done before him.

Then the unmistakable sounds of men moving about and exchanging words in an undertone reached his ears.

"I understand the solitary shots," he said; "they arise from the fact that only two or three are armed with rifles; but it is a state of things I cannot account for, as I saw that the greater portion of them had the long old-fashioned rifles when they were in hiding earlier in the day."

"I reckon that, in the confusion of flight," suggested Morse, "the men dropped their guns, and have not been able to recover them in the dark."

This appeared to be a reasonable supposition; there was, indeed, no other they could think of. For a time there were no more shots, and no sound of movement without. Jim, missing Romeo and Charley,

the bear, went to the back part of the house and found them partaking of supper together.

"Here am a job, Marse Gordon," said Romeo, "no fader and grandfader lef for me. Dey gone 'way jes' like ole Farrell."

"I cannot understand their being such fools," said Jim. "When did they go?"

"Dunno, Marse Gordon. Dey wasn't here when me come in. Dat all 'bout it. Dey get inter trouble, I 'spect, and serbe 'em right for a pair ob ole fools."

"Am we?" said a muffled voice from somewhere near.

There was a shuffling sound, and a pair of big black feet and shins came sliding down the chimney. They were followed by the rest of the body of Hamlet, whose sable countenance was speckled with wood-ash from the crevices in the flue.

He was promptly followed by the aged Macbeth in a similar condition. It was to be inferred that they had taken to the chimney in their fright, Macbeth leading the way and Hamlet going after.

"Ole fools, am we?" said Hamlet, wrathfully. "So we may be, to stick up dere 'cause we not suttin it am you here gorgering yourself."

"We tink it am de robbers," said Macbeth. "Marse Gordon, axing you pardon, but me not see you, for de ash in me eye, till dis moment."

"You 'berrer go up de chimley agen," advised Romeo, rebelliously. "What good am you?"

"They had better make some coffee," said Jim; "it will be wanted. Sleep-to-night cannot be thought of. Let all the boys have some and what they may need in the way of food."

"Loramarcy, sure!" groaned Macbeth, "but dis a bad job, sure. Dere nuffin' to do but to lay up de ghose."

Muttering dolorously, he went into the store-room at the back of the kitchen to get some coffee, of which there was fortunately still a considerable store.

Jim again visited the various groups of boys posted in different parts of the building. Then he went on to the dormitories, where the youngest of them were lying down in their clothes. As he feared, not one of them was asleep. He told them not to be afraid, as the worst was over.

But, as if in mockery of him, the firing outside was at that very moment renewed. He counted seven rapid shots in succession, and he judged that Morse was correct in his surmise. The Spaniards had dropped their weapons in their first fright, but now had recovered some of them.

They seemed to have no definite idea of attacking any particular part of the house, for after the first few shots they fired through the upper windows, and even at the walls of the house. For a quarter of an hour the desultory fire was kept up, and then ceased as suddenly as it began.

There was no promise of rest that night, and at intervals of half an hour the firing was renewed until it was about two in the morning, and then the elements suddenly came to the rescue.

A terrific flash of lightning opened the ball.

It was so vivid that it seemed as if every corner in the house was filled with the electric fluid. The light of the lamps was as nothing, and even after the flash the contrast was still so great that it seemed for a moment as if complete darkness had come again.

The thunder that followed was deafening, and it rolled and rolled until it was thought it would never cease. Another brilliant display of electric power was instantaneously succeeded by thunder and rain. The latter was a deluge.

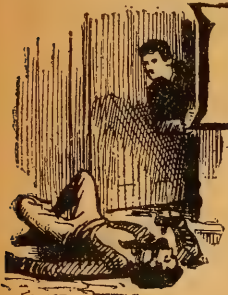
As it beat against the house it contended with the thunder for supremacy in the matter of noise, and with a considerable measure of success.

So great was the downpour that the ordinary shoots of the house were totally inadequate to carry off the water, and little cataracts of it could be heard falling with musical splashing to the ground.

It was an appalling storm, but it brought comfort with it. The enemy could not remain in the open. For the rest of the night they would be in such shelter as they could find, and the schoolhouse would be free of their unwelcome presence.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE DAWN AFTER THE DELUGE.—A GENERAL EXODUS.



FROM a downpour of almost unexampled violence the rain subsided to an ordinary fall, and, as daylight approached, entirely ceased. The clouds fled or melted away, and when the sun rose above the horizon the sky had resumed its familiar serenity.

The sea was in a state of violent agitation still, and a breeze, bordering on a gale, blowing. Jim looked forth and saw nothing of their enemies, save one lying on the doorstep dead, and another some distance away, who was huddled up on the sands, apparently asleep.

But Jim remembered that Charley had pursued the men in the darkness, and a cry he heard re-echoed in his ears. The nature of that sleep was evident to him.

But though the enemy was not in sight, it could not be hoped that the Spaniards were gone for good

and all. The probabilities were that they would not attack in daylight, but when the night came again they would assuredly renew their efforts. And the end, if the boys remained in the schoolhouse, was certain.

Fatigued with watching, most of those who had performed that duty were sleeping in every imaginable posture and wherever they could make themselves temporarily comfortable.

It would have been ludicrous, if it had not been pathetic, to see the youngsters in the schoolroom stretched upon the desks, on the forms, upon the ground, anywhere they fancied at the moment of being overcome with fatigue, unconscious of all trouble past and trouble to come.

Then the smallest boys, who came creeping down from the dormitories, with their faces white with the terror of the time and their eyes red for want of sleep.

Jim bade them have a good wash with cold water, and then give a hand in preparing and laying an early breakfast.

For Jim had already formed plans of what he considered ought to be done to even temporarily ensure their safety. It would, however, be only courtesy if he held a consultation with the rest.

Eveline appeared early and took upon herself the superintendence of domestic matters, generally performed by her mother, who, after a restless night, had fallen into a sound sleep.

Jim had a long talk with her and revealed his plans. She had such faith in him that it was hardly possible that she should see anything but perfection in them.

Soon the house was awake, and the word was passed for all to hurry up with breakfast, as an important movement was pending. What it was could only be surmised, for those concerned in arranging it were shut up in Mr. Farrell's room.

Changeling was outside, doing duty as a sentry, to give the alarm in case the enemy should return.

But there were no serious apprehensions on that score, and it was only as a wise matter of precaution that Changeling was appointed to perform that duty. He was very proud of it, and, armed with a long iron bar, paraded up and down in the orthodox sentinel fashion.

Lal Brodie and a few others joined him. The youngsters tried to look and speak as if nothing unusual had happened in the night, but it was a failure.

"What's going to be the end of this, Bob?" asked Brodie.

Changeling shook his head mournfully as he replied:

"I wouldn't care to say. It don't matter to a chap like me, who was changed at his birth, and haven't any parents as he knows on to shed a tear for him

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



Carefully they brought the boat up to the side of the derelict vessel.
and they climbed on board.

The sail was lowered

But with you boys it is different. Still, what I says is, 'Keep up your 'arts and hope for the best.'"

"We'll try to," said Dibble, "but it isn't easy. I wish I was like Jim Gordon. He isn't afraid of anything or anybody."

"He, of course," said Changeling, "is a feelomener."

"A what?"

"A feelomener—a sort of hextra-sized 'un—a speciality in the way of boys. Not as *I* looks on him as a boy. He's as much of a man as most men here. Look at that Mr. Farrell—but there, I won't waste my breath in talking of a man as isn't one. Moreover," added Changeling, solemnly, "he may by this time be wittles for the crabs, as I see there's a boat gone, and him and the rest of the levanters went in her, for a dead cert."

Rifle came hurrying up to them. He was perhaps the most nervous boy in the whole school. He had known a rough time of it from his birth, having, as he said, been left to the tender care of a relative who was anything but tender.

He was panting with excitement.

"What do you think is going to be done?" he cried.

"Can't say," drawled Lal Brodie; "but you look as if you had been ordered for immediate execution."

"I can't help my looks," said Rifle; "it is Gordon's doing. We are to leave the schoolhouse at once—that is, as soon as we've had breakfast."

"What on earth is his game?" exclaimed Brodie.

"We are to live in the castle," said Rifle, "all of us, and there is to be a regular house-moving. But first he and Morse and some of the bigger chaps are going up there first to make sure the way is clear. Don't you think we shall be safer here?"

"It's a good move," said Dibble, "if it can be carried out, but——"

"If Gordon has the management of it," said Changeling, "it will be done. But I think there will be trouble. Blow it! there's the stores, and the bedding, and the—the—all sorts of things, but here is——"

"Come to breakfast, smart," said Jim, from the doorway. "There is a lot of work to be done, and all must do their share. You can come in, too, Changeling. I have been looking round from the roof, and there is no fear of our being disturbed."

From the appearance of the dining-room it was plain that Jim's plans were known, and efforts were being made to assist him in every way. The meal was being hurriedly partaken of, the majority of the boys standing, and, as Terry remarked, "pegging away at their food as if for a wager."

Charley, the bear, roaming about, was fed in fragments, a mode of taking refreshment he apparently enjoyed exceedingly. Quick as they all were, a great number had not finished when Jim, with about forty of the stronger boys, and Martin disappeared.

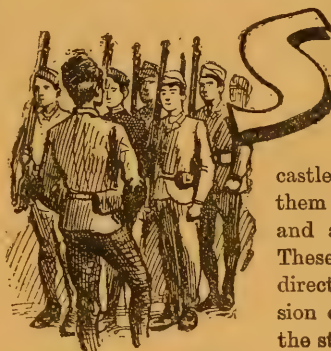
Morse remained behind to direct the movements of the rest, and his instructions were promptly obeyed.

The men were set to work pulling down the beds and packing up the linen for removal. The stores of flour and groceries others set to work dividing into handy portions ready for transport. The tinned meats—a necessity in their isolated position—were also packed, in two or three dozens, in old boxes. In short, the preparations for a rapid flitting from the house were begun with wonderful energy.

The fatigue of the night was forgotten. They were as people in the presence of an impending earthquake or the coming of a powerful army. An immediate flight was necessary, and although there was some inevitable confusion, the coolness and steadiness of the vast majority may be set down as remarkable.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE FLITTING TO THE OLD CASTLE.



TEENE, Hillyard, and Felton, about seven o'clock, came back from the castle, bringing with them half a dozen rifles and ammunition apiece. These were, by Morse's direction, taken possession of by eighteen of the sturdiest of the boys,

He himself had a revolver.

"Fall in," was the word, and they fell in outside the house. Two minutes later, Eveline and Mrs. Farrell appeared, the latter more composed than she had been for many hours. They had been summoned to leave the school.

Morse, heading the escort, accompanied them on their way to the castle, where they safely arrived and were received by Jim Gordon.

No signs of the enemy were seen *en route*, and Jim privately informed Morse that he had been upon the battlements, but could see no indication of the presence of the Spaniards, save that the feluccas were still visible at sea.

"From that we may deduct they are still on the island," he said.

Morse returned with three of the escort, bearing back additional arms from the store which had been accumulated in the castle. Up to that day there were many portions of the huge building which had seldom, if ever, been visited by the schoolboys, but now they

were busy throwing open long uninhabited chambers, and sweeping them out with all the industry of charwomen on piece-work, for the various uses they would be needed for.

No light task was in the hands of Jim and his lieutenants. The number of boys and men who had to be quartered was considerable, and it was now Eveline showed that she was possessed of some of the administrative power that her father was so wont to boast of.

Mrs. Farrell, also, as boys say, "bucked up" to meet the occasion, and with Eveline went about the castle, and gave Jim a lot of sensible advice as to the disposition of the various rooms.

It was a day of excitement and bustle, but unbroken by any diversion from the enemy. Jim posted his sentries about the castle, but he was unable to gain access at the time to two of the tallest towers, as they were shut off by strong iron-bound doors with huge locks, in which there were no keys.

"And if we had the keys," said Jim, who was examining them in Eveline's company, "I doubt if they would be of any service. The inside of these locks must be one mass of rust."

By-and-by the stores and bedding began to arrive, each party with an armed escort, and Jim had his hands full, directing them here and there, so that immediately the things arrived, everything was put in its place, if not exactly in perfect order.

The big hall, used as the armoury, was also to be the store-room, and one side of it soon bore the appearance of a huge provision establishment. The men worked loyally and well, and in the excitement and bustle of the time the absent ones were forgotten.

Charley also allowed himself to be made useful, and went to and fro, bringing upon his back, strapped and bound, some of the packages and boxes too heavy for his human friends.

The three negroes having been sent early to the castle, were taken in hand by Mrs. Farrell, who saw that they were kept fully employed in the kitchen and domestic portions of the castle.

Somehow everybody, as the hours went by, gathered strength and courage from being in the castle. The solidity of it gave one a sense of security.

Then there were the forts, which were not, however, sufficiently completed to be of service as a means of defence.

Dinner was a scrambling meal, and very little time was given to it.

In the afternoon some wood was cut down and conveyed into the castle for fuel. Morse built up a heap, after the model of the French charcoal-burners, at the back of the Redan fort and set it alight. He intended, as soon as possible, to prepare some more gunpowder.

There were many things that could not be brought from the house that day, but they were principally heavy articles of furniture, which really could be dispensed with. The movable contents and the lighter drawers were brought up with the rest of the things.

With so many at work without hindrance, a vast amount of work was got through. In the castle sufficient order was attained, and when the night was at hand the tired boys were all ready to rest.

Martin devoted the last hour of daylight to oiling the hinges of the great gates and the chain of the portcullis, and by degrees he succeeded in getting both in fair working order. They were closed at dusk, and the huge bolts having been drawn, Martin said, grimly: "It will take all their time to force a way in. We may sleep easily to-night."

"I want a few hours badly," replied Jim, yawning; "but we must keep a watch, nevertheless."

"Leave it to me," said Morse. "I have something to think out, and the battlements are the very place for brooding."

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

DISTURBING THE EMPTY NEST.—THE LONE SPECTATOR ON THE BATTLEMENTS.



IN utter stillness Morse lounged upon the battlements, keeping his lonely watch.

Worn out by their exertions and lulled by a sense of security, all the others in the castle had fallen asleep in the partly-arranged rooms.

There was no great regularity about anything as yet, but the boys enjoyed the semi-muddle, for it was strongly suggestive of camping-out or of the life of a gipsy, which is supposed to be the very acme of freedom.

Morse, always of a meditative disposition, was particularly thoughtful that night. The scene lying at his feet, like the probable outcome of the troubles of the school, was dark and undefined. Deep shadows lay everywhere, save out at sea, where there was a faint phosphorescent glow.

It shimmered in the gloom with a dreamy effect, and for a while his mind wandered back to a childhood spent in a home where all but science was tabooed.

His father was a learned man, a brilliant luminary in the society to which he belonged, but somewhat heavy and unsociable at home. What would he be when he became a man, should he live to be one? Would he, too, develop into a scientific bear?

Then he turned his thoughts to Jim Gordon, and recognised in him the romantic and more genial element that would keep him from falling into the track of his father.

"Science is good," he said, "but it will not do to give one's whole self to it."

He looked up at the stars, never brighter than at that hour, each a wonder and lasting marvel to the thinking student. He asked himself if ever he would know more of them than the telescope and calculation could tell? What a glorious thing it would be to wander from one to the other and look upon new scenes, new laws of life, new everything! And then he was brought back to the things around him by the report of a rifle.

It came from below, not far from the schoolhouse, and, rising to that height, it was not very loud to the ear, but the nature of it could not be mistaken. It was followed by a glimmer of light, right away beyond the main pool of the lagoon, and, as he judged, in the region of that paradise of flowers growing on the picturesque borderland.

Here was something he could not comprehend, but he had no time to dwell upon it, for the first sound of the rifles was followed by another and another, and finally a fusillade.

"The fools," chuckled Morse, "they have no inkling of our being here. They think we are still boxed up in that in that old barn of a place. Where have they been, and what have they been doing that they have no information of our movements? But then," he added, "it would never occur to them that we should flit up here. Jim was right when he said that it was a move that would flabbergast them."

Jim had said as much. He was almost certain that the Spaniards had retreated to the chine, or to some spot too far away for them to be in a position to observe the movements of the occupants of the school. His opinion was confirmed by this firing at an empty house.

It continued for a time, and then there was silence. No movement in the castle indicated that the sleepers had been disturbed.

The light on the outer shore of the lagoon, after blazing up and gathering strength, was soon extinguished. It must have been intentionally done, for Morse saw it scattered about as if some persons were kicking it about with the object of extinguishing it.

"I should like to be below," thought Morse, "and give those fellows one of my patent shocks."

But it would not be prudent for his own safety or that of his friends to leave the castle. So he abandoned the idea, and waited and watched.

For half an hour, it might have been a little more, there was no renewal of the firing, but at length the stillness was broken by a series of soft, dumb sounds,

which Morse, after listening intently, judged were blows dealt by some heavy instrument on wood-work.

"They are at the door again," he muttered, and a smile lit up his face. There was something almost humorous in the Spaniards taking so much trouble to open a door that had only been closed, not locked.

Presently the sounds ceased, and another stillness followed, only to give place to a faint shouting. The attacking party had discovered that the house was empty. Well, there was nothing but the heavy furniture, and that none of the best, for them to wreak their vengeance upon, and Morse enjoyed the joke so hugely that he laughed aloud.

And all this time the sleepers in the castle slept on, unconscious of the wrecking of the schoolhouse that was being carried on. Morse expected they would set it on fire. It would be the natural climax to their work, and he was not deceived.

Soon the flickering of the flame was seen, and it rose higher and higher, until he could see the men capering about the beach, well out of the reach of the fire.

And they had cunningly taken up a position with the sea to the rear, so that they were safe from attack. If the late occupants of the schoolhouse ventured upon assailing them, they would have to advance in the full glare of the conflagration, and thus be in a position to be shot at.

Morse could not clearly count the men, but there were not less than fifty still, and they were all of the type they had met with on the other side of the island.

He understood the nature of the precaution they had taken, and smiled again. There was no likelihood of a sortie being made from the castle, even if the occupants awoke. But they all slept on.

Higher and higher rose the fire, for the building, having so much wood about it, burned merrily.

It seemed to Morse that it illumined the whole of the island on that side, and the sea as far as the horizon. He could see the shimmer of it on the waves miles away.

And, looking up at the great towers of the castle, he saw they were tinged with red, and stood out boldly against the cloudless sky. To the right and the left the light penetrated the woods and tinged the trunks of trees and the rocks with the prevailing hue, and it would have been difficult to conceive a more beautiful picture. It had an unearthly look. It was a huge transformation scene, such as never has been shown even in part upon the stage.

As the flames rose and fell, the shadows took fantastic forms, that the vivid imagination of Morse shaped into woodland satyrs and elves, capering about in the unholy glee of a witches' midnight.

Once there was a sudden darkness, owing to the

falling in of the roof. But it was brief, for the fire, replenished with the new material supplied in the half-burnt beams and collapsing woodwork, burst out anew, and the light was more brilliant than ever.

The conflagration extended along the whole line of buildings. Even the post-office shared in the fate of the rest. Ere the morning broke, the schoolhouse erected by Napoleon Farrell would be naught but smouldering ashes.

Like his reputation, it would be gone for ever. Napoleon had fallen, and the house he had built upon the sands was wrecked, never to be restored again.

Morse, sole spectator of the scene, watched it until there was nothing but a faint glow. Long before it came to that, he had observed the Spaniards stealing away in the direction of Silver Bay, and satisfied that even he might sleep, he curled himself up by the wall of the battlements, and gave himself up to repose.

CHAPTER XC.

THE RETURN OF DAY.—SCOUTING IN SEARCH OF THE ENEMY.



It was Eveline who was first up in the morning. She occupied, with her mother, a small chamber at the back of the store-room.

Having dressed, and ascertained there was nobody about the chief room adjoining, she stole out, crossed the courtyard, and made her

way to the portcullis gate.

Still nobody stirring, and remembering the staircase that led to the battlements, she stole up to get a view of the island in the resplendent light of the early morning. As she stepped out of the gloom of the staircase into the light, she saw Morse lying with his head upon his arm, still asleep.

His face was upturned, and it had upon it the look of absolute repose. Eveline stooped over him and gazed at the well-formed features, noting, for the first time in her life, how handsome he really was.

His face was different from Jim Gordon's. One was indicative of coming manly strength, the other of intellect and refined thought. Eveline was strangely moved as she gazed at him, but the feeling was more of awe and admiration of a superior than anything else. It had never been apparent to her before that here was a genius who, with all his delicacy, might one day do something to rock the world.

But it flashed on her now, remembering the wonderful things he had already done in the way of invention. There he was—a boy no more, but one who had handled with the utmost coolness materials that, if carelessly manipulated, would resent the blunder by blowing him into a million fragments. He suddenly became a living marvel in her eyes.

While she was still gazing at him in dumb wonderment, he awoke and saw her. In a moment he was on his feet, with a faint smile upon his face.

"I am a pretty fellow for a sentinel, you will think," he said, "but I assure you that before I lay down I knew there was no danger to be apprehended for a while. I saw those fellows going back to Silver Bay."

"You saw them?" said Eveline, amazed. "Were you outside the castle last night?"

"No," he answered, "I saw them by the light of a big fire—a very big fire. Can you not guess where it was?"

She grasped his meaning, and her face turned deadly pale, but rallying, she said, quietly :

"The schoolhouse is burnt down?"

"It is," answered Morse. "It was a wonderful sight, and at another time I would have aroused you all to witness it. For good or ill, the castle is now our only home, while we stay on the island."

"How long will that be?" exclaimed Eveline, sadly.

"I must answer you vaguely," he said. "Until we can get away."

They walked on a little way, with their backs to the staircase of the tower. Eveline laid her hand upon his shoulder in the confidential way of a girl speaking to a brother.

"On you and Jim we all rely," she said.

It was at this moment that Jim in person appeared at the head of the staircase. He came up so quietly that they did not hear him, and their backs being turned from him, of course did not see him. His face expressed surprise, then anger, and finally pain. Without saying a word or making his presence known, he stole softly back again.

Jim was proud, and strong enough to hide his wounds. He also recognised the fact that he was too much of a boy "to worry about a girl." He therefore resolved to look upon Eveline as a bit of a minx, fond of admiration, and willing to recognise it from whomsoever it might come.

As for Morse—well, Jim had the sincerest affection for him, and he also intensely believed in his ability, and it must be a very serious matter to induce Jim to quarrel with him. As for going so far on account of Eveline or any other girl, Jim felt inclined to laugh at the idea.

But he did not laugh at all. On the contrary, he eventually, for a time, felt very savage, but he worked

off steam by attending to the duties of the day devolving on him as leader of the castle. There was much to do, as everything was in a state of semi-disorder. The domestic portion of the work he, of course, left to the directorship of Mrs. Farrell, and for a time there would of necessity be many shifts.

It will occur to the reader that the accustomed comforts of the school would have in a measure to be abandoned. In short, roughing it would have to be the order of the day.

Still, much could be done by exercising ingenuity, and by all who had a bit of gumption in them lending a hand. The youngest of the boys could make the beds—not a very heroic office, but, under the circumstances, meritoriously useful.

Jim held a meeting in the hall as soon as the boys were up, and explained his views.

"I know," he said, addressing the youngest especially, "that I have not told you off for a very high class of duty, but it is a dead sure thing that no form of labour dishonours anyone if a necessity arises for it to be done. Idleness alone entitles a man to condemnation."

The youngsters rose to the situation and said they would do anything to help, and if he wanted them to fight as well as make beds, and do other domestic work, they would do it. Jim commended them for their pluck, and expressed a hope that their troubles would be over in a few days.

He did not say in what way he thought they would be "over," but he was hopeful in his manner, and they gathered heart from it.

One of the things imperative was done early that morning. Mrs. Farrell overhauled the stores, and in her opinion they would need replenishing in such things as flour for bread and biscuits, etc., within a fortnight at the latest.

As this could only be done by obtaining that supply by ship, Jim looked very glum; but a ray of comfort was derived from the communication made by Eveline, to the effect that, fully four months before, additional stores had been ordered in due course, and might possibly arrive in time.

But the dismal fact remained that the stores had not been advised in due course by any letters as yet received by mail. As the letters came by fast steamer—fast, anyway, for Spain—and the stores by sailing-vessels, there ought to have been some intimation by the last mail to hand that they were on the way.

"But I know the letter went," said Jim, "for I delivered that mail on board myself."

During this, the early part of the morning, he had avoided Morse, but a council having been called for ten o'clock, he met him there, and Morse showed an utter unconsciousness of having done anything to cast a shadow on their friendship.

Jim, of course, was himself, and as the men had been invited to attend, they met in Morse's laboratory, he having assured them that everything dangerous had been carefully put out of the way. There was a long and earnest debate.

It was considered essential that the position of the enemy should be ascertained, or some intelligence of their movements obtained.

For this purpose two scouting parties were formed. One under Morse, who would lead them to the chine by the underground ways, and another commanded by Terry, who were to scout in the open. Jim, as commander of the castle, remained behind.

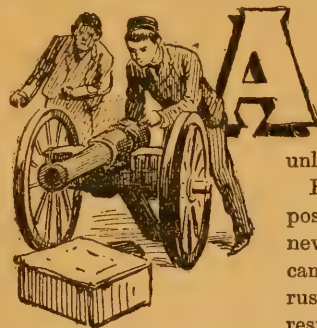
"Be careful how you go," he said to Terry, as with a half-dozen followers, all armed with rifles, he was about to start down the path; "make sure there is nobody in front or on either side of you, the latter particularly. The moment you sight anyone and have the least idea of your being discovered, hark back with all speed."

"And should we meet with one of the fellows," said Terry, "and he bolts?"

"Shoot him," said Jim; "it would be idle to spare a single member of that ill-conditioned fraternity. I think our one chance of present safety and future peace lies in our effectually cutting them off. *We must not allow one of the band to leave the island alive!*"

CHAPTER XCI.

THE RETURN OF THE SCOUTS.—"BETSY" AND "BELLA",



FORTNIGHT," thought Jim, "it isn't long before we shall have to make some terrible shifts, unless the ship arrives."

He had thought of the possible strait before, but never so seriously. It came upon him with a rush. Hitherto the full responsibility of providing

for the little host belonging to the school had been in other hands. Now it had mainly devolved upon him, and the magnitude of the task lost nothing by his being so young.

"If those blackguards have any gumption," he mused, "they will not risk their precious lives in attacking us, but just starve us out."

He sat upon the parapet of the bridge outside the castle as he revolved this matter in his mind. In the forts some of the boys were busy giving the finishing touches to them, and around in every direction Jim

had posted sentinels to give timely warning of the appearance of friend or foe. The hour was three in the afternoon, and neither of the scouting parties had returned.

Behind the fort Redan, the charcoal-making fire of Morse's building was still burning. It would not be ready to be opened until late that night. So the builder of it had said.

Jim watched the thin pencils of smoke creeping upward through crevices in the clay covering of the burning wood, until he was aroused from a day-dream by a soft hand laid upon his shoulder. He knew who it was without looking round.

"I have not had a word with you to-day, Jim."

"There has been so much to do."

It was Eveline, and removing her hand, she sat down on the other side of the bridge, and taking some crochet-work from her pocket, went on for a time gathering up the stitches in silence. Jim feigned to be earnestly watching the boys at work on the forts.

"How very talkative we are!" said Eveline, suddenly.

"I beg your pardon?" returned Jim, looking round.

"I merely remarked how very talkative we are."

"Oh!"

Jim got up and walked away, whistling. Eveline raised her eyebrows and went on with her work. But she made several false stitches, and was obliged to unravel it again, which she did in a jerky fashion. Whatever she was making had been only just begun, and finally she wrenched it off the needles and tossed it into the waters of the moat.

"I hate people with tempers!" she said, just loud enough for Jim to hear as he stood midway between her and the labouring boys.

He heard her, and a feeling of repentance came over him. But on turning round he saw that she was gone.

"Morse will talk her into a better temper when he returns," muttered Jim, grimly.

Voices from below changed the current of his thought. One of the sentinels posted down the castle path came hurrying up to announce that Terry and his party were returning.

"They are dragging two small heavy cases charred by the fire," he replied.

Jim went down to meet them, and found Terry and his small band gallantly struggling with two stout wooden cases, about three feet square.

They had put some pieces of cord about them and were hauling them up like mountaineers engaged in conveying goods over the steep part of mountains.

"What have you there?" asked Jim.

"We found them among the ashes of the post-office," replied Terry. "I remember having seen them under the counter."

"What do you mean by the ashes of the post-office?" asked Jim.

"The whole place," said Terry—"schoolhouse, workshops, post-office—seems to have been burnt down last night."

"I'll be hanged!" muttered Jim, "and Morse must have seen it. Why could he not have told me of it?"

"Perhaps he knows nothing or it," suggested Terry.

"But he kept watch."

"Perhaps he didn't."

Jim was both puzzled and perturbed. The burning of the schoolhouse was not a very serious matter in his eyes, save as indication of the activity of the enemy. From that point of view it was very serious indeed. But he said no more, reserving himself for the return of Morse.

He, too, remembered having seen the two cases under the counter in the post-office, but had never been curious about them. He thought they contained some ordinary materials, such as ink and so on. Even now he did not know what they contained, and the weight stimulating his curiosity, he lent a hand in hauling them up as far as the castle gate.

Having obtained an axe, he opened the cases, and found inside two small guns of the pattern of old-fashioned cannon, such as are used at regattas and public fêtes to fire salutes.

Jim saw they were strong and well made, and it occurred to him that they might be very useful. He desired Terry to see they were carefully unpacked in the courtyard and left there.

While Terry was thus engaged, Mrs. Farrell and Eveline appeared. The former, on seeing the guns, uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, here, Eveline," she said, "are the two guns your papa bought to fire on the anniversaries of the great Napoleon's victories. I laughed at the idea at the time, and he took umbrage at it."

"And that is why, ma'am," said Terry, "they have never been unpacked and fired?"

"I used to think so," replied Mrs. Farrell, "but now I must hold a different opinion."

She did not say what it was, but as her changed opinion was the correct one, we may as well give it to the reader. Mr. Farrell, on reflection, had arrived at the conclusion that firing such parlous weapons was rather a dangerous proceeding, and so they had never been unpacked.

While the work was still unfinished, Jim came in with the boys who had been working as the sentries, and the gates were closed for the night. It was early, of course, but as closing them would leave everyone free of outside duty, it was done.

"I say, Jim," said Terry, "isn't it a fact that all guns, like ships, have a name?"

"They used to have, I believe, but I won't be sure."

"These guns ought to have names," said Terry.

"Well, call them what you like," returned Jim.

"All serene," said Terry; "then I christen them 'Betsy' and 'Bella.'"

"What absurd names!" said Eveline.

"They are ladies' names," answered Terry, "and I give them to these little beauties because I hope they will, like the tender sex, *speaking to some purpose*—when they open their mouths."

"What a donkey that boy is!" said Eveline to Jim; but he only shrugged his shoulders. He was not in the humour to appreciate a joke.

The guns were really of very good material and make, for Mr. Farrell had been induced to speculate in what had been originally intended to be army mountain-guns of small calibre. They were made by an English firm of note for a foreign Government, but the said foreign Government not showing a commendable alacrity in paying beforehand for the weapons, they had never been delivered.

The stands were in sections in the cases, and Jim and Terry occupied an hour in putting them together. When complete, the guns were little models of artillery.

The afternoon was now far advanced, and Jim was getting anxious about Morse but it was soon allayed by the appearance of that young scientist with his followers all safe and sound.

Jim could see that he had something of import to tell, but there was one subject on his mind that he wanted cleared up at once. Drawing Morse aside, he said, somewhat reproachfully:

"You might have told me that the schoolhouse was burnt down."

"I would have done so," answered Morse, "but for Eveline."

"Oh! She stopped your telling me?" said Jim, drily.

"Yes," simply replied Morse. "She came up to the battlements this morning, and I told her what I had seen. It was a glorious sight."

"I have no doubt you described it to her as a grand spectacle. She must have been entertained."

"Hardly, Jim. What stuff you are talking! She was deeply affected, and she was afraid it would worry you, and so asked me not to name it until we had got things in order here. I told her you were not the fellow to be worried by anything, but she insisted on your not being told at present. She very truly said that speaking about it would not build up the house again. I rather insisted on wishing to inform you of it, but seeing that she was really deeply anxious that you should not have anything additional to worry you, I promised not to mention it. Now, Jim, I want to have a quiet confab with you in my sanctum."

"I'll come in a minute," replied Jim; "excuse me for a few moments. I have something important to attend to."

He hurried away, Morse staring after him in surprise.

"What is up with Jim," he asked himself. "He has been queer all day."

Leaving it as problem for future solving, he walked away to his laboratory. Jim was not long in following him. All he was eager to do was to get away into some quiet corner alone, and devote a few moments to reviling himself as something equivalent to a fool.

"So that is what they were talking about," he muttered, as he stood in a dark corner of the chamber by the outer gate, "thinking of me, and making arrangements for my peace; while I—Jim Gordon, you are the biggest ass in creation!"

It seemed to do him good thus laying on himself the most uncomplimentary thing that could be said of him, and, much relieved, though still in a state of self-humiliation, he hastened to join Morse in the laboratory.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE MORNING.—JIM CONCEIVES A PLAN OF ATTACK ON THE SPANIARDS.



JIM could not confess his error to his friend. That would have been expecting too much of him.

Nor indeed would it have been sensible of him, for Morse would not have benefited by the confession.

Morse never wasted a moment if he could help it, and when Jim entered his sanctum he was

busy with some experiment. But laying aside his materials, he said:

"Jim, we've spotted those fellows. The whole tribe seems to have a natural gravitation towards the chine, and they are camped at the mouth of it."

"I suspected as much," replied Jim, "although I felt that the open bay nearer to the boats would have been a more likely place."

"They do not fear attack," said Jim; "one can see that by their manner of going about. They have no sentries or men on the lookout anywhere, as far as I could see."

"What were they doing?"

"Some were cooking, others playing cards, or some game equivalent to dominoes with marked squares of wood. As usual, they wrangled as they played, and one looking at them would have thought that they

were simply a gang of Spanish gipsies camped in a place for the day."

"Could you hear what they were talking about?"

"I crept out of the mouth of the cave and stole down as near to them as I thought would be safe. I was fully forty yards away, and as they were all talking together, or nearly so, I had a difficulty in getting at their subject of conversation. But it proved to be what I expected it would be—the attack on the schoolhouse and our mysterious disappearance."

"What did they think of that?"

"Well, Jim, opinion was divided. Some thought we had been taken off the island by some passing vessel. Others fancied we had simply cleared out to some other part of the island, and a few were sure we had come on to the castle. They talked of the two explosions which had taken place, and attributed them to mines. They were also eloquent on Charley, the bear, and, as I judged, they held him in dread. 'Still,' said one, 'he is not bullet-proof, and we have most of our guns again.'"

"How many of them did you see?" asked Jim.

"All, I should say," replied Morse; "all who survive. There are fifty-two of them, and thirty-odd have long, old-fashioned rifles. All have knives and revolvers."

Jim made a grimace, and thoughtfully drummed his fingers on the table ere he answered.

"A strong body for us to contend with—that is, if we wait to be attacked. We ought to take the initiative."

"I heard them talk of sending a scouting party in the direction of the castle to-night," said Morse.

"Half a dozen men at the outside," said Jim, "and, with the gates closed, they will be able to do nothing. Morse, we must attack them from the direction of the cave."

"Fifty-two men, Jim?"

"Yes, and fifty-one less of us could play havoc with them by stealing out at dusk. Fancy the effect of a rattling fire into the thick of them as they sit jabbering round the fire. They are sure to light one, if only for company."

"It would demoralise them," remarked Morse; "but you must have a cool lot with you, in case we have to skedaddle back."

"I will take all the men and the pick of the boys," said Jim, "including yourself. Terry alone, out of the council, I propose to spare, and leave him in command. It is the thing to do—the only thing."

"I agree with you," Morse said, "and I must be one of your party. Out of a few old meat-tins I think I can manufacture a bomb or two that will make them sit up or lie down."

"There is not much time to spare," said Jim.

"I shall be ready in an hour," replied Morse; "but we must hold off until dusk."

Jim nodded, and leaving Morse to his bomb-making, he went off to see to the other arrangements. A few words with the men sufficed to enlist them in the service of Jim for the attack, and the boys were all eager to share in it.

The task of selecting weapons and seeing they were in order was entrusted to Martin. Of cartridges there were about four apiece. By-and-by, when Morse could get his new supply of charcoal, he would go in for manufacturing powder on a larger scale. Meanwhile there was about a pound loose, which Terry having discovered, quietly appropriated for a purpose to be hereafter explained.

While the preparations were being made, Jim saw nothing of Eveline, but he was anxious to come across her, and make things right, if he did not succeed in explaining them.

But he could only meet with Mrs. Farrell, who every hour rose more to the position, and developed unsuspected pluck. Jim asked for Eveline, and was told she was in her room with a headache.

Jim was mightily concerned about her, but was reassured that it was a thing that would soon pass off, as Eveline had rarely if ever been troubled with such a thing before.

Romeo, hearing of preparations of some sort going on, presented himself before Jim with the object of being taken on as a recruit. But Jim had home work for him. It was to keep guard over the two women folk, with Charley, the bear.

"Do it on the quiet," said Jim. "I only wish it done as an extra precaution, although I think there is nothing to fear. I shall be away for an hour or two with Morse and a few others."

"Better not tell Miss Ebeline dat," whispered Romeo.

"Well, perhaps not," said Jim, after a moment's thought.

Terry took kindly to the position of commander of the castle in the absence of the two friends he called "the big guns," and he harangued those left in his charge in the courtyard, while the rest in the big hall prepared for their attack on the foe.

The spirit of the whole school was excellent. Possibly living in a higher and more exhilarating atmosphere may have had something to do with it, or the mere novelty of their surroundings may have raised their spirits; but the fact remained that they showed none of the trepidation one might have looked for in boys so situated.

They cheered Terry as their temporary leader, and then made the most of the daylight by playing all sorts of boyish games in the courtyard.

Leapfrog, as demanding less exercise of ingenuity

and no paraphernalia, was most popular. The place was alive with moving youths, shouting and laughing in their glee.

Here and there, as in the case of Dibble and Riffle and two or three of the very youngest, there might have been a feeling of inward trepidation, but to their honour they refused to show it.

At an early hour Martin closed and securely barred the gates. The portcullis was also let down, and so far the castle was safe.

But the huge building was erected before firearms were in use, and gunpowder not heard of save by a scientific few, who never conceived how its uses would be developed in the future. If they had thought of it, the portcullis would not have been made of open ironwork. Strong, yet no defence against the holder of a rifle, provided the holder could climb up, or get on some handy level to fire through it.

Jim had noticed this, and he made reference to it in private to Terry, who went into the great hall to have a few final words with him.

It was growing dark then, but the lamps had not been lighted, for they were short of oil, and had to use it sparingly. He explained to Terry that a scouting party were coming up in the direction of the castle, and the portcullis being closed, might tempt them to fire through it in mere wanton mischief, as they had done at the windows of the schoolhouse.

"One fellow standing on the shoulders of another," he said, "would be able to send a shot whistling through the first chamber, and it had better not be occupied, but keep the door closed."

"They may blow the gates down with gunpowder," said Terry, who had very hazy notions of warfare, "just as our men did at Delhi."

"My dear boy," said Jim, with a smile, "they won't be provided for that class of performance."

But Terry was not satisfied. He had got it into his head that the gates would have to be defended in a more efficient way than just closing them. But he said no more, and Jim went on with his preparatory work.

All the men were there, looking grave enough, and the selected boys for the expedition, and they were quiet, too. Each was armed with a rifle, and some in addition had short stout sticks slung to their sides, sword fashion, wherewith to defend themselves if they were attacked, or were called upon in any way to defend themselves at close quarters.

"Have all got their ammunition?" inquired Jim.

All answered in the affirmative.

"Then I think you may start. Morse will lead the way with the lamp. It will be necessary to preserve silence because it is possible that some of our enemies may be near the cave."

"And I assure you," quietly added Morse, as he lighted a small lantern, "that it is a perfect speaking-trumpet of a place. It has curious echoes, too, that rumble about parts of it we have never yet explored. That will be a task for us when the day comes when we shall be left in peace."

He led the way into the laboratory, and the trap being already open, he descended. Jim went next, and after him the men. Then the boys vanished one by one, and Terry squatted down in the dark, listening to the pit-pat of their footsteps until the sounds died away.

Then he rose up and, using the care the nature of the place justified, felt his way back to the hall, where he lighted another lamp, and summoned his followers from the courtyard, where they were playing about still in the faint light that came from the stars alone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TERRY'S INNER LINE OF DEFENCE.—EVELINE'S DESPAIR.



TERRY stood upon a chair with the lamp near him on the table. It was not a very brilliant light, and most of his

audience were in deep shadow. Some of the nearest had their bright, eager faces illumined by the light as they gazed up at him.

"Well, boys," he said, airily. "I am cock of the walk for a time, and have instructions to take such steps as are necessary to protect the castle. You will therefore assist me in erecting a platform just inside the portcullis for 'Betsy' and 'Bella,' those two nice little guns which Nap had in the post-office."

"Erecting a platform," said one of the boys, "will take us a week with the tools we have to use."

"In the store-room there are scores of packing-cases all empty," said Terry. "The strength of true engineering work does not lie so much in the weight of material as in construction. You be guided by me. Now, Pesketh, Trimmer, Bullfinch, Waller, and the rest of you, get to work. This lamp will suffice for you. I can start on my job with a candle. Hurry up!"

Now, Terry hardly believed that occasion would arise for the use of the cannon, but it was the first time he had been "boss of the show," and he wished to let some of the smaller boys see what he was made of.

"The fellows at Rorke's Drift," he said, "con-

structed a rampart out of mealie-bags. I will erect one from empty boxes."

With a tallow candle in his hand, he sallied out to the gate, and having fixed his feeble means of illumination against the wall, he awaited the coming of his "men" with the boxes.

They soon appeared, like a string of ants, each bearing something he thought would be useful for the work.

Terry immediately set to work, making what he believed to be a strong foundation of loose boxes, and piling others upon them.

In half an hour he had a platform, of a sort, level with the top of the gates.

His next care was to have "Betsy" and "Bella" hoisted up to him, which was a stiffish bit of work; for the guns, though small, were heavy. He found that he had got his platform the right height, and the muzzles would go through the intersections of the lower part of the portcullis.

"Now," he said, "I reckon we could hold the place against an army."

Now they had to be loaded, and he fetched the powder he had smuggled away, and a bag of nails, for the purpose of using it as shot.

Remounting the platform, he proceeded to the dividing of the powder into two equal portions. The boys—as many as could get near—watched him curiously.

"Mind you put the powder in first," suggested Trimmer, sarcastically.

"I will use up your head for a ramrod if you give me any of your cheek," returned Terry. "I am well up in this work, for I have a cousin an officer in the artillery."

"I have a cousin a civil engineer," said Bullfinch, sententiously, "but I could not construct a Channel tunnel."

"Shut up," growled Terry, "and don't attempt to be funny."

"Good gracious, boys! what are you doing here?"

The exclamation came from Eveline, who had come up to the boys from the main path of the castle, and they had made way for her so that she could see Terry at work.

"We are preparing a line of defence," said Terry, modestly, ignoring his special part in it by generalising.

"By Gordon's orders, I presume?"

"No; he knows nothing about it."

"Where is he?"

Terry had to explain, which he did in a few brief words. Eveline listened with amazement and alarm.

"He is gone to fight men in the open?" she said.

"How many are there of them?"

"About fifty," replied Terry.

"Madness!" cried Eveline. "He will be killed, and we shall have nobody to help us in our trouble."

"Excuse me, Miss Eveline," said Terry, rather nettled, "there will be a few of us left."

"You are nothing!" she said, hurriedly. "Nothing beside him. Morse, too, where is he?"

"With Jim," said Terry.

A low wail of pain escaped Eveline, and her next question was about the men. They were gone, too, and hearing that, her dismay was complete. It was not in her nature to give way needlessly, and but for being somewhat unstrung she would not have shown so much emotion then; but she had been troubled with qualms of conscience about Jim, whom she thought she had not treated well.

His being a little queer that afternoon ought not to have led her to be chilly with him. She was looking for him to make it up, when she came upon Terry at work, and learnt what was to her very serious news.

"He will be killed!" she said, as she hurried away.

"Thinks a lot of Jim, I reckon," said Terry, as he proceeded with the loading of the guns. "Now we put in the powder first, and wad on the top of that. Having no regular wad, I use this bit of rag."

"It's a duster!" said Waller.

"Shut up, I say!" cried Terry; "suppose it is. Now for the shot. About two pounds of nails will, I think, fill the bill."

He loaded both the cannons in this fashion, and then was ready for the foe. So he declared, and he dismissed all the boys, saying he would watch alone.

"You want all the glory of blowing the blackguards to pieces?" said Pesketh.

"I do!" candidly answered Terry. "The plan is mine. Conceived all out of my own head. Away with you. All's well. Be at rest."

There was some attempt at demurring, but Terry threatened to report them to Jim for mutinous conduct, and they went away.

Terry, squatting on the summit of his work, peered through the square of the portcullis ironwork. Outside there was not much to be seen.

Terry had about an hour to himself, the stillness only broken by murmuring sounds from the direction of the great hall where the boys were at play. Then he was aroused from dreamy reflection by the arrival of Romeo, and Charley, the bear.

"Miss Eveline ketch me looking after her," said Romeo; "and de hall being pretty full, me come 'long here."

"All right," replied Terry; "but do not make more noise than you can help."

He was not sorry to have a companion, and Romeo climbed up and squatted down by his side. Charley remained below, immediately under the platform of boxes.

Then there was again silence.

It acted as a soporific both to Romeo and Charley, who dozed off and on, fighting with the somnolent influence, but presently yielding to it.

Terry spoke to Romeo in a whisper, but getting no answer let him sleep on. He peered over the side, but could see nothing of Charley in the dark, though he could hear the gentle breathing of that noble animal.

"Good company, this!" he muttered.

His thoughts were now turned away from them by a slight sound outside. Peering through the portcullis, he saw in dim outline the figures of several men. How many there were he could not tell. To his startled and perhaps exaggerated vision there seemed to be a host of them.

The idea that the castle was about to be assaulted by the foe in force took possession of him, and he hurriedly brought "Bella," the gun, to bear on them, without, it may be said, any certainty as to aim.

Terry, in spite of having a cousin in the artillery, was a novice in gunnery, but he knew that the ordinary way of firing a small cannon was by applying a match to the touch-hole.

He had them ready, and taking one out of the box, he struck it. Then he put it near the touch-hole, and shut his eyes. There was a moment's pause, and then a roar as of an earthquake.

It was followed by a yell of alarm outside. Terry heard it, as he felt himself struck in the chest with some heavy object, and rolled over. He fancied—although he was hardly in the condition of mind to fancy anything very clearly—that he fell upon the back of Charley.

Certain it is that the next part of the performance was very distinct and comprehensible. The whole of the platform, with Romeo, came down with a rush, and buried both Terry and Charley under the ruins.

CHAPTER XCIV.

THE ATTACKING PARTY HAVE A SURPRISE.—AN ADVANCE UPON THE REAR OF THE FOE.



MORSE led the way to the mouth of the cave without a hitch. He had been so often through that portion of the cavern that he could have found his way there blindfold.

The night, as they expected, continued fine, and away by the mouth of the chine they could see the faint

glowing of fires. Jim was of opinion there were three alight, but were burning low.

The latter fact rather puzzled him and his friends. They knew that if the Spaniards cared for a fire at all in that climate, it would be for cooking or as a means of enabling them to see the cards as they gambled. It was much too early for them to be asleep.

Quietly desiring all to be as silent as possible, he called a council with Morse and Martin. They stood a little apart from the rest, more in the open, and conferred in whispers.

"This looks like an ambush," said Jim. "It is possible they may have discovered your coming here."

He addressed Morse, who asked him how that could be.

"You would leave a trail to and from the cave as you crept down to listen to them. There has been daylight since, do not forget."

"But it would be the trail of a single person," said Morse. "Surely they would not be so superlatively cunning about one foe?"

"They are a set of varmints," remarked Martin. "Of course, we ought to have some idea if there is a trap set. Let me go forward and see."

"No," said Jim; "that is my task."

"Or mine," said Morse.

"You did the last bit of scouting," returned Jim, "so I go now. If you hear anything like a fight, hasten back to the castle and look to them there. I daresay I shall be able to look to myself."

"Certainly," sarcastically answered Morse. "Is there anything else ridiculous you can suggest? No, my boy; if there should be any fighting, *we are in it!*"

"My rifle will only be an encumbrance, as I may have to climb about," said Jim, as he handed it to Martin.

The blacksmith took it, felt the lock to see if it was off-cock, and laid it across his arm. Jim glided away, and was soon lost in the gloom.

He travelled along the top of the cliff until he was obliged by the nature of the ground to descend half-way to the bottom of the chine. On the way he saw no one, heard no sound, and puzzled by the strange stillness, he halted and endeavoured to make out who or what was near the fires.

But he soon came to the conclusion that there was nobody near them. This was more puzzling still. Then he stared with all his eyes about the chine, and could make out nothing that could be shaped into the figure of a man.

"Are they gone?" he asked himself.

He hesitated a moment, and then went on with his hand upon a knife he carried in a sheath attached to his belt, and on the lookout for any foe who might be hidden among the bushes or behind the jutting rocks.

But he went on without interruption until he was

at the very mouth of the chine, with the expiring fires at his feet.

It was certain then that they were quite deserted. There was nobody near them. Whatever had become of the enemy, nothing would be more foolish than wasting time there in speculation; so Jim hastened back to his friends and gave in his report.

"They're not gone," was Morse's instantly-expressed opinion.

"Where are they?" asked Jim. "Judging by the fires, they may have been there half an hour ago."

"May I venture to give my view of the matter?" asked Martin.

"Of course," said Jim.

"Then I think they've gone on to the castle, intending to try their hand at taking it by surprise."

"Whew! If that is the case, we are worse than useless here. Morse, we must hark back."

"No," said Morse; "that would be worse still. We should be too late, if wanted, crawling along through the cavern. We had better go after the ruffians and *take them in the rear*."

"Supposing they are not there, but have really gone away?"

"Then our chums will let us in."

"I forgot that," said Jim, with a smile. "Well, I think your plan is as good as any."

It was adopted, and in a few minutes the whole of the boys had descended to the bottom of the chine. But still every precaution was exercised, in case of an ambush, and they reached the open by the camp-fires and found no living thing.

Jim now went on a few yards ahead, bidding the others follow and be ready to act in a case of surprise. The familiar way was quickly trodden, and anon they stood outside the ruins of the old schoolhouse.

Here they instinctively halted and looked at all that was left of the familiar haunt. In the gloom it was nothing more than an irregular mound, more interesting than touching. The loss of it did not arouse any deep sentimental feeling.

"I suppose," said Morse, breaking the silence, "it is about the best thing that could have happened to it."

Then they hastened on, and at the top of the castle-path again halted. Still no sign of the enemy, or any indication of his having been that way. Above, all seemed as still as the catacombs.

But not for long. Suddenly there was heard, high up by the castle, a muffled roar, as if a mine had been sprung, and Jim, who happened to be looking in that direction at the time, saw a bright flash of light.

Then there was a shouting and screaming, and a downward rush of feet.

"Something's happened," said Jim, hurriedly, "and they're coming this way. Stand off on the up-side—form in a line!"

The boys, though anything but perfectly trained, swiftly obeyed his orders. The line was formed, and Jim, with Martin, stood at the lower end.

"All rifles loaded?" asked Jim.

The answer was "Yes."

Jim looked to his own weapon, quietly giving a final order:

"Make sure it is those blackguards coming down, and when you are so, let fly *into the brown of them*. In other words, treat them as a covey of partridges."

The boys stood ready, holding their breath under the excitement of the hour. Down lower and lower came the rush of feet, mingled with the hum of angry, terrified voices.

But though there was the sound of many feet, their downward approach was not very rapid. This was owing to the darkness; but the foremost appeared at last—a figure dimly marked out against a dingy background. They let him go, for he was several feet ahead of the rest, and Jim had not given the signal to fire.

Then came another and another, all of whom fled on into the gloom ahead. Then came the main body, scrambling and cursing in their haste, and Jim uttered the word:

"*Fire!*"

The boys pulled the triggers, and the rattle of the rifles echoed on every side. But their aim must have been very wild, for only three of the little crowd of men fell. The rest, with a renewed power of yelling startled out of them, tore away and disappeared ere the reloading of the rifles could be attended to.

Jim was not of a bloodthirsty disposition, but he was disappointed with the result of the fire, because he hoped to inflict such a loss upon the enemy that he would never appear in their neighbourhood again.

"Morse," he said, "give us a light, if only for a few seconds."

"Wait a moment," said Morse; "give that lot time to get away."

They stood still for a while, and from the fallen men there came no sound.

Were they dead?

It was a question Jim asked himself, and when Morse eventually lighted up one of his special matches, its glare was sufficient to reveal the fact that all the trio were stilled for ever.

Strange to say, they had all been shot in the head, and the missing of the others showed that all the party must have fired too high.

There was some excuse for them, for they had no discernible object to aim at, but had to guess where to fire by sound.

As the men were past all help, they were left lying there, and the now elated adventurers of the night ascended the pathway. It was true they had not

accomplished all they aimed at, but they had done something towards bringing confusion on the foe.

Then there was the question of that strange booming sound they had heard. The reader will readily guess what it was, but it was a problem to Jim and his friends, and the only conclusion they could come to was that the Spaniards had attempted to blow open the castle gate, and failed.

They were not a little astonished on their arrival at the castle to hear a perfect babel of voices inside, and a sound of tumbling over empty boxes.

"Hi, there! Mind what you are doing; he may be mortally hurt," said one of the boys, louder than the other speakers. "Steady!"

"Look out! Here comes Charley."

There was a perfect roar of the falling about of empty boxes and screams of laughter. Then, as the noise subsided a bit, the voice of Terry was heard:

"You are a set of idiots! What are you grinning at? I tell you I have blown the whole gang to pieces!"

"I can assure you Terry"—it was Eveline speaking now—"that most of them ran away. I was on the ramparts looking out when they came up. When that dreadful cannon went off, the shot, or whatever you had in the gun, went amongst the trees, rattling like hail. But I do not think you killed a single man."

"Give me a leg up," said Jim to Martin.

Martin did so, the rest keeping as still as mice. Jim peered through the portcullis, and saw a scene that he laughed at, whenever he thought of it, for weeks afterwards.

Standing amidst a chaos of wooden boxes were Terry and half a dozen boys. Romeo was near, cautiously feeling his head, as if he feared it had been cracked. Terry also, by the way, had the appearance of having recently been shaken up in a bag.

Eveline stood by the door of the courtyard, and behind her there was a mass of boys' heads. The only light was a lantern held by Eveline.

"I am of the opinion that not one of the fellows are left alive," said Terry, emphatically.

"There are a few of us left," said Jim, solemnly. "Open the gate and let us in. Hasten and get beds ready for the wounded."

"Save us!" cried Terry. "Who is that?"

Eveline uttered a little scream as, by the light of the lantern, she saw Jim's face above the gate and between the portcullis bars. The boys now saw him also.

"Why didn't you call out who you were?" groaned the dismayed Terry. "If you had only said one word——"

"Did you ask for it?" sternly demanded Jim.

"No—o—o—o, I didn't."

"Then why talk about a word? You fired as soon as you saw us."

"I did."

"Clear away that rubbish and open the gate."

Eveline stared hard at Jim, and his eyes meeting hers, he slightly depressed one eyelid. It was not a vulgar wink, but a quiet intimation for her not to be agitated on their account. She understood.

The wretched Terry moved stiffly as he toiled with the others to clear away the *débris* of his inner defence. He had been shaken up by his fall, and the shock Jim had given him was a trying one.

He asked a few questions as he worked, such as "Who is killed?" "I hope there aren't many wounded?" and so on, to all of which he obtained the vaguest replies.

One by one the boxes were tossed back and pitched into the courtyard, until the gate was clear, and then Terry with trembling hands opened it.

Jim marched in and took him by the arm.

"You will be placed under arrest for exceeding your orders, and to-morrow be tried for manslaughter."

The face of Terry was a study, and it was with difficulty Jim could keep his countenance. But he preserved it for the time, and as his followers came marching in, he bade them surround the wretched culprit and see that he did not escape.

"Well," said Terry, with sudden resolution, "you may hang me if you like, but what I did I did for the best. If you could not trust me, why did you leave me in charge?"

"You had to obey orders," said Jim, with the gravity of a judge.

"But who was here to give orders, and if you thought me such an ass that I could not be left to act on my own initiative, why did you leave me in command at all?"

Thus spoke Terry, goaded by his emotions, and there was some sound reasoning in his address. Jim gave him a smack on the back that nearly rolled him over.

"That's all right, old boy," he said. "You may congratulate yourself that you have done harm to neither friend nor foe."

Terry stared at him, bewildered.

"He has a cousin in the artillery," squeaked some boy in the crowd.

Terry faced in the direction of the voice, but made no retort.

"Perhaps it is only his grandmother," said Trimmer.

Recognising the voice this time, Terry wrathfully asked Trimmer to "come out and have his head punched."

"Punch your own," advised Bullfinch; "it will do you good."

"Quiet, boys," said Jim. "Well, Terry, we have

had our joke with you; but, seriously, you ought not to have tried the artillery without knowing how to use it. You did fire at our foes, but whatever was in the gun, it failed to hit them."

"There was a pound of French nails," murmured Terry.

"Then they have had a merciful escape," said Jim. "Close the gates, and to the hall every man-jack of you. Hey, then, Charley! how are you?"

The bear rubbed his head affectionately against Jim's shoulder, and then turning to Eveline, who had been looking quietly on, Jim said, with a smile:

"I hope you will not think I am totally unworthy of a kind word from you, but I feel uncommonly small."

"Why?" Eveline asked.

"I saw you on the ramparts with Morse," said Jim, lowering his voice, "and made a mistake."

"The ramparts?"

"Ramparts and the battlements are the same things."

"Indeed! I did not know it. Well, you saw us together, and what then?"

"Eveline, don't you understand?"

"Can't say I do."

"You won't understand, Evy, and that is all about it. But never mind. I know where I fell into an error, and that suffices."

The boys had now departed. The gates were closed and made fast. Jim and Eveline were slowly strolling across the yard.

"Jim," she said, after a short silence, "I know what you mean. You thought that Morse was making love to me. But he was doing nothing of the sort. He doesn't care a bit for me."

"That's all right," said Jim, comfortably.

"But I care for him a lot."

"Evy!"

"I do, and if he had made love to me I should have been very glad. But as he did nothing of the sort, it is all over between us."

"Well, I'm bothered!" exclaimed Jim, completely taken aback by this harking round on a peculiar tack.

Eveline perversely went on.

"He is the cleverest and handsomest boy in the whole school, and I admire him wonderfully. It is not my fault if I do. I can't help it any more than thinking that you have made yourself very ridiculous."

Such are the ways of women and girls. Not half an hour before, Eveline was weeping over the prospect of not seeing Jim again; but now that he was returned safe and sound, she raked up a comparatively old grievance, and hurled it at his head. The bolt being shot, she raised her nose in the air and left him.

CHAPTER XCV.

THE RESULT OF TERRY'S SHOT.—A SHORT REST.—THE QUESTION OF PROVISIONS.



JIM had too much to do, and too many worries on his mind, to dwell on the peculiar way Eveline had treated him. Having told the story of the night's adventures to the boys, he dismissed the main body of them to

bed, for the hour was late.

But he remained up himself with the members of the Council of Ten, save Terry, who "took the hump" over the chaff of his friends on his prowess as an artilleryman, and went off to his couch with the others.

There was one serious question to be discussed, apart from the presence of the foe—it was that of provisions. Jim was quite right when he said that it would never do to leave it until the last moment, for that might lead to a very serious state of things.

The ship expected with the flour and other things was the "Orsini," a Spanish vessel trading to England and back. She carried wine to the port of London, and brought back any cargo available. Hitherto she had always had commissions from Nap Farrell, and, as before stated, she was expected within a fortnight.

But Jim, having gained access to some correspondence brought away by Mrs. Farrell from her husband's room, discovered that the ship was really due before that time, and if she did not appear by the date mentioned in the papers—August 1—she need not be looked for at all.

This was quite on a line with the Spanish way of doing business, and it conveyed the intimation that the interests of the school were nothing to the captain of the vessel, and that if he could get a cargo for elsewhere that paid him a little better to carry, he should take it.

Long and earnest was the discussion on this topic, and it resulted in the council coming to the conclusion that somebody ought to risk a run to sea in one of the boats, which were still moored off the shore, and, intercepting some passing vessel, send a message as to their position to the governor at Gibraltar.

"At a pinch," said Jim, "we could struggle on a month, if we were at liberty. But in less than a fortnight, if pent up here, we shall starve."

Then came the question, who was to go upon this

mission? Jim could not be spared, nor Morse, nor indeed any of the council, most of whom had no knowledge of boating.

"Two would be sufficient," said Jim, "and Lal Brodie and Stiff would suffice. They know how to manage a boat."

It was decided to put the matter before the two youngsters, and give them the opportunity of voting. It was a task entirely for a willing horse.

Jim went up to the chamber in which the two boys slept, and found them, as he expected, very wide-awake.

The boys were split up into parties of a dozen or so, and although the chambers were barren enough, they made themselves very jolly. They expressed not only their willingness, but eagerness to go on the mission.

"Then all you have to do," said Jim, "is to get up very early—before daylight, if possible—and get down to the boats. You can have your choice; but I recommend you to take one that will carry a felucca sail. You know how to manage it. All you have to do is to watch for a white squall. Though this is hardly the season for the coming of such a visitor, it is as well to be prepared. One can never tell when it comes."

"Until it is here," said Lal. "All right, cap, we shall be ready in the morning."

"I will have a bag of grub got ready for you to-night," said Jim—"enough for three days, in case you are obliged to keep to sea, or have to land on some other part of the island."

Jim bade them good-night and returned to the council, whom he dismissed for the night, being resolved on taking his turn at watching. He faithfully performed this duty, and Lal Brodie and Stiff, rising in the morning before the sun, found him in the courtyard awaiting them. He had a bag of provisions and a stone jar of water ready for them, which he handed over with the comforting assurance that he had but just descended from the ramparts, and there was nobody on the sands below.

He had also written a letter to the Gibraltar governor, setting forth the particulars of the fix they were in, and asking for help to drive their foes from the island, or if not, then in escaping therefrom. It was considered advisable that they should carry arms, with half-a-dozen rounds of ammunition. More could not be spared.

"If the need of using it arises," said Jim, "use it sparingly, but well. Don't waste a pinch of powder or a grain of lead."

He saw them out of the castle and down the path, waiting at the foot of it until Lal Brodie had swum off to one of the anchored boats and brought it nearer in for Stiff.

Close by Jim lay the three men who had been shot the previous evening. They were not the handsomest

men in the world, but he could not help pitying them. Twenty-four hours before, they had been alive and active. Now they were only fit for the prey of carrion birds or food for fishes.

As he had no means of interring them, he contented himself with drawing their bodies aside and laying them under the shelter of a rock, afterwards covering their faces with boughs he pulled from adjacent bushes.

That work of reverence done, he hastened back to the castle and spent the intervening time between then and breakfast in throwing off the covering of Morse's charcoal fires, so as to expose and cool the charred wood within.

Later on he and Morse laid it all out to cool, and the morning was spent in various forms of labour—hauling in wood for the fires and filling the tanks near the kitchen with water. Up to the present they had been unable to find a well or pump within the castle.

CHAPTER XCVI.

THE CASTAWAYS.—A DERELICT VESSEL.



LAL Brodie and Stiff in the boat speedily found their way out to sea.

The boat was not the one they used to take to meet the mails, but one of a similar build, and it had a felucca sail, a little smaller than that Jim used to manage.

They were fully a mile from the shore, when Stiff, who was steering, fancied he heard some shouting from the rear. He was about to turn his head, when Brodie signed to him not to do so.

"Here's a go!" he said; "whom do you think it is?"

Stiff did not know, but he was impatient to learn, and was rather exasperated with his companion, who, stooping down by the mast, peered over the gunwale of the boat, chuckling.

"Perhaps you will tell me who it is," said Stiff.

"Four men," replied Brodie, "all waving their arms like expiring teetotums. I reckon they are pretty well worn out."

"But who are they?"

"I am going to tell you if you will only give me time, only for goodness' sake don't turn round. We must sham not hearing them."

"If you don't tell me who they are," said Stiff, "I will throw that bag of tommy at your head."

"I am making them out," said Brodie. "There's

Chorker, and Nap, and Storeby, and that knock-kneed Turner."

"Where are they?"

"On the rocks fronting the lagoon."

"How the deuce did they get there?"

"That's a problem. Stop a minute. I see a bit of a boat and the remains of a fire. They tried to clear out, I reckon, on that awfully dark night, and got wrecked. My eye, what a lark!"

"Can't they get on the mainland?"

"No. Don't you remember? Although not exactly an island, yon ridge is cut off from the main shore with a rift, a crack in the earth, at the bottom of which there are ten or twelve feet of water. Quite enough to daunt that lot, none of whom can swim worth a cent."

"But suppose they are starving there?"

"Well, a little fasting won't hurt them. Besides, what will be our share of the tommy after they have done with the bag? Let them wait until we return. Head her for that rock now. We are out of the course of the dangerous reefs."

"I can see a something," said Stiff, leaning over the side and looking ahead, "I can't make out. I spotted it some minutes ago and thought it was a rock. But it has shifted, and now it looks like a whale."

"There are no whales in this sea," said Brodie. "Where is it?"

Stiff pointed in a southerly direction at an object in the sea, about two miles to the south. Brodie at once proclaimed it a vessel of some sort.

"It is either a monster boat," he said, "or a dismantled vessel."

"Shall I make for it?"

"Yes, but do not go direct. Bear off a bit in case it is something we shall better get along without."

The boat soon brought them near enough to enable them to see that it was a small brig with her two masts gone. There was a mass of loose rigging hanging over the side, and to all appearance her deck was deserted.

"She has met with a white squall and come to grief," said Brodie. "Run in nearer and see if we are hailed by any of her crew."

Stiff did so, and brought the boat up in the eye of the wind when they were within a cable's length of the ship. Still there was no sign of life on board.

"She is deserted," said Brodie, after a careful survey of the hull; "all her boats are gone."

"I think we ought to go on board," said Stiff.

"You mean you are bursting to see what is to be seen," remarked Brodie. "Well, so am I. We'll inspect her forthwith."

Carefully they brought the boat up to the side of the vessel near some of the rigging that hung overboard, a tangled mass of rope and canvas.

The sail was lowered and they climbed on board.

A glance showed the completeness of the disaster that had befallen her. Both her masts had been broken off, "like carrots," said Stiff—one about four feet from the deck, and the other a little shorter. Most of the main rigging had gone by the board or been cut away by the crew.

Though somewhat low in the water, she was on a perfectly even keel, rising and falling with the swell of the sea, and gave no idea of being waterlogged.

In addition to the wreckage of ropes and some of the lighter spars, the deck was strewn with all sorts of odds and ends.

Boxes had been opened and cast aside, hampers, rush baskets, and what not. In the forecabin there were a score at least of big empty hencoops.

"I see what has happened," said Brodie, "as clear as if I had been here at the time. Finding the ship helpless, the crew resolved to desert her and make for the shore. Possibly a steam tug may be sent in search of her."

"She seems to me to have been plundered," said Stiff. "I say, Lal, suppose she has been plundered by pirates?"

"No," said Lal, "there's no blood on her deck. The crew simply cleared out. I am going below."

They stepped down the companionway and found all deserted there. They first visited the main cabin, which was in a very orderly condition. Beyond the removal of what may be considered the private effects of the captain, nothing had been taken away.

On the table lay a book, which Lal said he was sure was the log. Opening it, he found that it was so. On the top of the first page was writing to that effect in Spanish.

"Log of the 'Orsini,'" said Brodie, translating the paragraph.

"The 'Orsini'!" exclaimed Stiff. "Why, that is the vessel Jim was speaking of—expected with fresh stores for the school, you know."

They stared at each other in breathless astonishment for a few moments. Without any delay they had come upon the vessel they were in search of, but under very peculiar and unfortunate circumstances.

"Come on deck," said Brodie. "I must have a look round before I can decide what we ought to do."

They ascended again, and from the deck looked round the sea and towards the island. The "Orsini" was fully three miles from land, and the question was whether she was drifting away from it or towards it.

"I think she is making for it," said Brodie, "but she is travelling precious slowly, and if ever she strikes land at all it will be miles away from the spot where we could get to her. She has too much wind on her beam."

As they had all the day before them they decided

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By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.

The Island School!



"My love, I will avenge you. ALONE I WILL DO IT!" Then she sprang upon the top of the earthwork, and leaping down, vanished from sight.

to make a cursory examination of the hold where the stores would naturally be.

Hoisting up the hatches, they descended the ladder they found fixed inside, but could only travel a 'short way. The hold was filled with bales and boxes, evidently the expected and soon-to-be-needed stores.

"Stiff, said Brodie, "we've got to get this craft ashore. It is no use howling about our being far away from our chums. I daresay, if we can ground her anywhere, Jim will find a means of getting the things up to the castle."

"But it strikes me," said Stiff, "that all these things were not for us."

"We can appropriate them, any way," grinned Brodie; "the 'Orsini' is derelict—anybody's property. Derelicts are dangerous at sea, and he who removes them earns the blessing of all good seamen."

"Well, I am with you," said Stiff. "The job is like my name. What shall we do first?"

"Look around for a bottle of Spanish wine and have our dinner," said Brodie; "the wines such as Spanish seamen drink are not remarkably heady."

CHAPTER XCVII.

SAILING THE DERELICT.—SLOW WORK WITH A GOOD
ENDING.



BRODIE'S advice was good, for both had now been some time at sea, with the usual result of a rising appetite. In the aft part of the "Orsini" they found the store-room, and by right of their finding the derelict

they broke it open and helped themselves to all they wanted. In addition to the wine, they selected a box of grapes, some olives and dried raisins—the latter for dessert—and squatting out on deck, enjoyed themselves hugely.

They were monarchs of all they surveyed, as far as the sea went, for there were no vessels in sight, and the "Orsini" by her position was hidden from the four distracted men Brodie had seen and Stiff heard hailing the boat from the shore. It was yet comparatively early in the day, and the cloudless sun was no more than pleasantly warm. The gentle breeze was exhilarating.

"I don't envy those fellows in the castle," said Stiff, with his mouth full of grapes. "I think, Lal, that I could live here for ever."

"For ever covers a considerable space of time,"

said Brodie, with a wise shake of the head, "but I could do a month of it. Only long before that the 'Orsini' would be spotted by somebody, even if the original crew did not come in search of her."

"I wonder they did not leave a portion of the crew on board."

"Well, there was a reason for their going, no doubt. I reckoned they thought she wasn't safe, and bunked it. Take another pull at the bottle. It is palatable, and not very intoxicating."

Lal knew nothing of practical seamanship, but he had read a number of books that gave him the theoretical part of the life. And in addition, he had picked up something from Jim in their outings to meet the mail-boat.

He remembered having read about jury masts, and an indefinite idea of what they were hovered in his mind. He thought that if he could rig one up somewhere forward, that the "Orsini" would be assisted towards the shore.

The helm seemed to be in good order, which he discovered by testing the working of the wheel, and that would be of some assistance. They hoped with good luck to strike the shore late that evening or during the night.

"And fancy," said Lal Brodie, "our having this fun all to ourselves!"

Stiff chuckled. It was in his estimation a real treat, and with his companion he set to work with a will to rig up a jury mast.

"Why jury mast?" asked Stiff, as they picked out of the wreckage hanging to the vessel a top spar. "Will this thing do for it?"

"I don't see anything better," answered Brodie. "As for why it is given the name of jury, I suppose it means a makeshift to be used until something better can be got."

"Don't see the application."

"No more do I. Fetch an axe and go to work cutting away some of this rubbish hanging over the side. It isn't ornamental, and it certainly isn't anything but an impediment."

The spar they were in possession of was not more than twenty feet long, but if it could be fixed it might be made serviceable. Lal thought of the way the mast of the felucca sail was fixed in the seat of a small boat, and it occurred to him that he had better drill a hole through the deck and fix his mast in a similar way.

While he was engaged in this work, which he performed with an auger he found below among a lot of tools, Stiff, with an axe obtained from a similar source, proceeded to cut away the tangled rigging.

He laboured so hard that in about ten minutes he was able to lean against the side of the vessel and draw Lal's attention to the fact by exclaiming:

"There, that job is done."

Lal, who was also toiling like a Trojan, raised his eyes, and passing his eyes across his brow to remove the perspiration, nodded approvingly.

"And I think," he said, "that there is a sensible lightening sensation of the ship."

"I am sure of it," rejoined Stiff. "And see! there goes the rubbish—oh! Hang it."

"What's the row?"

"I forgot we fastened the boat to the rubbish and it is floating away with it."

Lal Brodie sprang to his feet, and a glance over the side showed that it was so. The boat had fallen behind with the rubbish, and was as good as lost to them for ever.

"You are a guy!" he said, derisively, "but it's no use howling. Here we are on board this craft, and here we must stay, *wherever it may go*."

"I can't help it," said Stiff, despairingly. "You might have thought of the boat."

"Give me a hand with my mast," said Lal.

He had drilled several holes with the auger, so as to form a small circle of them. By knocking out the centre with the axe, he made a rough socket for the mast. Naturally, of itself it would have slipped through, but having lowered it a foot or so, they drove in some stout nails, and so steadied it.

But it was a poor thing at the finish, and when they got a bit of canvas spread upon it the first puff of wind pushed it over, and gave it a drunken and very disreputable appearance.

"I am a poor hand at this work," said Lal, scratching his head. "And this mast and sail are about as much use as a tablecloth on a walking-stick would be."

"I don't think it will heel further over," said Stiff, hopefully.

They stayed the mast as well as they could with guy-ropes, and then squatted down by the helm, which they secured in a position that would guide the "Orsini" the way they desired to go. By-and-by, as the sun got warmer, they rigged up an awning, and lying down under it they fell asleep.

Healthy boys sleep long, especially in warm weather and under the circumstances that induced our two young friends to seek repose. Lal Brodie and Stiff did not awaken until the afternoon was far gone. It was Stiff who first opened his eyes and wondered for a moment where he was.

A slight jerk and a grinding sound assisted him to clear his faculties, and sitting up, he gave Lal a jerk with his elbow ere he rose to his feet.

"Let a fellow have another minute," said Lal, sleepily; "it can't be more than six o'clock."

"That's about the time," said Stiff. "Pull yourself together. We're on board the 'Orsini.' Blow it! what's that?"

It was a curious, grinding sound that drew this exclamation from him, and another jerk followed.

Running to the side he saw exactly what was the matter. The "Orsini" was aground.

She had drifted right on to the island, but the exact spot Stiff did not know.

It was a comfort, anyway, to find that they were there, and so far safe from the perils of the sea.

Though aground, the "Orsini" was not by any means high and dry. There were at least forty yards of shallow water to wade through—a mere nothing to boys who were not afraid of getting wet.

"There is one thing we must think of," said Lal, "before we leave the ship even for an hour, and that is—the chances of her floating again."

"I don't see 'em," said Stiff.

"Perhaps not," returned Lal, "but I do. A change of wind will do it; but unless it is a very smart breeze, a moderate-sized rope will hold her."

He then propounded the plan of taking a light rope ashore, and afterwards, if they were strong enough, to haul to land one of the anchor cables—without the anchor, of course—and make it fast among the rocks.

"Then," said he, "we can remain ashore for the night, and in the morning revisit the old derelict. It is almost too late to-night to ascertain exactly where we are"—he glanced at the sinking sun—"but we may be handier for the castle than we suspect."

"A good five miles away, I reckon," said Stiff.

"Suppose we are," rejoined Lal, "that won't stop one of us from going up there and getting help to clear out the stores. But first let us secure the 'Orsini,' so that she won't float off and go blundering away."

There was a plentiful supply of rope among the stores below, and having knotted three or four coils together, Lal dropped over the side with one end in his hand.

Stiff remained on board to pay it out, and Lal successfully conveyed his end to the shore. There he laid it on the beach and secured it with two heavy stones.

That done, he returned on board. With an axe he cut through the cable that held one of the anchors in the ordinary state of suspension, and the iron implement fell into the sea. The severed cable was then attached to the smaller rope, and a considerable portion of it worked off the capstan.

It was stiff work turning the latter round, but the boys accomplished it, and having laid out the released cable so that it would run easily, they dropped over the side, and together hauled it to the shore.

"About eight hours of this work a day," said Lal, as he wiped his forehead, "will suffice for me."

"The same here," assented Stiff.

But the great fact remained, they had got the cable ashore, and there they piled upon the end of it such a mass of big stones, quite a cairn, and so wound the smaller rope about, that it seemed next door to impossible for the "Orsini" to give them the slip.

By this time the sun was dipping for the night, and darkness would soon be there. So they hurried back to the vessel to get some creature comforts—food and drink and the means of obtaining fire.

Lal was delighted when he came across a small oil-stove, something like the modern "Beatrice" pattern, on which they could heat water and do their cooking without creating a flaring light that could be seen at a distance of a hundred yards, especially when it was screened by a small bank of sand erected round it, at the distance of a foot or so.

Having slept so long during the day, they were not disposed for sleep during the early part of the night. Indeed, they kept vigil until the small hours of the morning were far advanced.

It was an experience they were never likely to forget—the stillness of night, the faint lapping of the sea, the refulgent stars, the utter loneliness of their position, combined to fix the time indelibly on their memory.

They talked in whispers of home and friends, of their recent experiences on the island, and then told stories they had read in books to each other—of travellers lost in jungles and castaway seamen, not forgetting that dear old impossible Robinson Crusoe.

Once near the midnight hour they heard a far-off cry, but whether of man, bird, or beast they could not tell.

At last they slept again on this the second night since they left their companions of the castle, but only for an hour or two.

Lal was aroused by a hand upon his arm gently shaking him. It was Stiff who was kneeling by him.

"Don't get up," he said, "but just look along the shore and tell me what you see on the top of the furthestmost rock."

"It looks like a small monument," said Lal after staring at the object, which was more than a mile away, "or a stone post, or the trunk of a tree stripped of its branches."

"It is neither one nor the other," said Stiff, "but a man. I saw him come to the top of the cliff, rising, as he would seem to do at that distance, out of the ground."

"He is looking this way," said Lal.

"So I think. But it isn't easy to say. There he goes, down again."

"Perhaps he is coming this way."

"Can't say. He can't be seen against the dark rock if he is. What shall we do?"

"Keep ashore, of course, and see if he comes this way. We had better hide somewhere."

"Wouldn't aboard the ship be safer?"

"Not if he has others with him. We should be boxed up on board, and they could lay us by the heels as they willed at any moment. No. If that fellow comes along and turns out to be a Spaniard, we had better—what shall we do?"

"If he is alone," was the cool reply, "we had better tackle him."

They retired to a short distance from the sea and hid themselves among the rocks, from whence they occasionally peeped forth.

For some time they saw nothing. Half an hour had elapsed, or it might be a little more, when Lal suddenly, after one of the peeps out, exclaimed:

"Here he comes. It is one man alone. Get hold of a handy-sized stone, and when he is near enough let fly at him. Hit him in the wind; it will be better than killing him. We ought to be able to take him prisoner."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RALLYING HIS FORCES.—A WOMAN IN BONDAGE.



ENCAMPED upon the old spot by the mouth of the chine, the Spaniards gambled and drank and swore as they had done previous to their route to the castle. Hard by, walking to and fro, was their chief, Espardo.

Reonardo, in close conversation with one of his most trusted followers, a tall, lithe young man, attired in the dress of an Andalusian peasant.

"Lorenzo," said Reonardo, "I know not what to make of the puny forces we are contending with. Excepting a mere handful of men, they are boys—children."

Lorenzo shrugged his shoulders.

"Chief," he said, "they must have allies outside the castle—men armed."

"A whole day," said Reonardo, "we have scouted, and seen no living man. We have even ventured to bury the dead, and no one has hindered us."

"For all that," insisted Lorenzo, "we were fired upon that night."

"When you fled at the sound of some wretched piece of ordnance the cubs have obtained possession of."

"At the sound, indeed!" returned Lorenzo.

"Surely, chief, you do us an injustice, seeing that it took us hours to pick the accursed nails out of our clothing and flesh. Scarce a man of us but brought back with him at least three or four mementos of our visit to the castle."

"Well, it was a child's toy that scared you," said Reonardo, with a wave of his hand. "As for those we encountered outside, I believe it was a small party of the boys, who had taken advantage of the night, foraging for food—in their vineyard, I reckon."

"Which Ugolino is, by your command, now laying waste."

"It is time his work was done," said Reonardo, referring to a gold watch he wore. "He started before the dawn, and it is past the hour of noon."

"He may have fallen in with the young scouts from the castle."

"They will not venture forth in the daylight," confidently asserted the chief; "but it may be that his task is heavier than he deemed it. Ugolino is a good man, and of great strength, as becomes a Castilian blacksmith. I would not lose him, for it is to him we must look to act when the hour comes to break down the castle gates."

"They are not broken down yet," muttered Lorenzo.

"Take five men," said Reonardo, "and go to meet him. What! dost thou fear to do as I bid you?"

"I am not eager for the task, chief; but if you command I must obey."

"I have spoken."

The rejoinder was haughtily given, and Lorenzo, who knew the consequence of downright disobedience to orders, walked towards the gambling group and made known the commands of their chief. Low murmurings of a dissenting nature were heard.

"Who volunteers?" asked Lorenzo.

Not a man stirred.

Lorenzo savagely named five men, who in turn rose reluctantly from their places, and taking up their rifles from a stack of arms hard by, followed him on the way to the vineyard, to reach which they would have to pass the ruined schoolhouse.

Reonardo meanwhile, with a small but powerful field-glass, had been scanning the sea in the direction of Minorca. Ere long an exclamation of satisfaction escaped him. It originated in the appearance of a sail of the felucca type coming round a promontory of the island.

"She comes," he murmured, "my sweet Lucia, half-tigress and half-lamb. Now I must be wary how I smooth the way, for her jealousy must be put to sleep."

A quarrel among two or three of his men momentarily attracted his attention. He settled it by dashing in among them, striking one with his fist, kicking

another with his foot, and shaking a third until his teeth rattled in his head like castanets.

"Any more of this," he said, fiercely, "and I will stop your quarrelling for ever."

They knew he was a man of his word, and the game proceeded in a more subdued fashion. Reonardo having lighted a cigar, smoked it as he strolled to and fro, watching the coming of the small felucca boat.

It had but one occupant—Lucia di Valo—and she ran her little craft ashore with the impetuosity of a woman, and sprang out. Reonardo hastened forward to greet her with a warm smile of welcome on his face. But there was no responsive smile on hers.

"I am here," she said, "as I promised I would be."

"You were ever good and true," he answered, a little nonplussed by her bearing.

"True to the false," she answered, curtly.

"Lucia," he said, after a pause, "if this is the spirit in which you come to me, why come at all?"

"I wish to know," she answered, "if you are tired of pursuing a doll of a girl?"

"I have no doll in my thoughts," he replied. "I remain here solely to avenge my lost comrades."

"You have lied to me so often," she said, looking keenly at him; "can I believe you now?"

"I swear I do not deceive you," he cried, holding up his right hand clenched. "If that will not suffice, go and leave me—with my misery."

She softened a little, and he drew a step nearer to her.

"Come, Lucia," he said, tenderly, "if I have for a while been lured to the pursuit of a shadow, you know the strength of my love, and will forgive me."

"Deceive me again," she said, with her dark eyes fixed upon him, "and I will treat you as a common foe."

She touched her girdle, in which nestled the small, sharp stiletto, significantly.

"I understand you," he answered, "and, being faithful to you, can take the risk."

But even as he said this his mind began to hatch a scheme to rid himself of the woman he no longer loved, and of whom he was growing afraid.

He put his arm round her, and she yielded to his embrace. For the moment she was as the melting woman—the soft-hearted fool who loved and trusted.

After a while he asked her if she had seen aught of Giuseppe. She nodded in acquiescence.

"And will he not return here?" asked Reonardo.

"No," answered Lucia. "He says he is weary of attempting that which has already cost him so much, and must end in failure. He declares that the saints are all on the side of those who have the island."

"The saints have no power in the matter," said Reonardo, irreverently. "I left word for him to gather a band together and come to my help."

"He will not do it," said Lucia. "Bands of men are not to be had for the asking."

"But surely, Lucia, there are many who still burn to oust these strangers?"

"Ay, they burn, but not sufficiently to lead them to desert their own homes and risk their lives here."

"The curs!"

"Nay, be reasonable. They are no curs. Think of the number that hath already fallen. Not one of Giuseppe's crew remains."

Reonardo muttered something between his teeth and turned his face away. Looking along the shore, he saw Lorenzo with his five men behind him, running back with terror visible on their faces.

"Santa Maria!" he cried; "what has scared the dogs? Excuse me, dearest, for a moment."

He hastened to meet them, and Lucia followed, with a careless, swinging step. The fright of the coming men amused her.

"And yet they are our masters," she said, with a dry smile. "I should like to see living thing that could thus scatter *my* wits."

The entire body of men had by this time seen their hastily-returning comrades, and all were on their feet. Lorenzo plunged in amongst them and threw up his arms in terror.

"Poor Ugolino!" he cried.

"What ails him?" demanded Reonardo.

"He is dead, lying by the ruins of the school-house."

"Dead?"

"Ay. He could never have got so far as the vineyard, for his boots have not been soiled by richer ground than sand."

"Say, then," said Reonardo, with a bitter oath, "how did he die?"

"He has been strangled."

"Ugolino strangled!"

The exclamation was one of incredulity, but Lorenzo repeated the assurance.

"Strangled," he said, "but first, as I take it, struck with a stone on the back of his head, for there is a deep wound at its base, and the blood-stained stone lies close by. Then the murderer, as he lay senseless on the ground, must have completed his work, for Ugolino is dead!"

Lorenzo threw up his hands again in a paroxysm of fear, and the men murmured among themselves, the blood fleeing from their cheeks and leaving them a pale olive colour.

Espardo Reonardo glanced from one to the other of the five men who had accompanied Lorenzo, and read nothing in their faces but a confirmation of his story.

"It is not their way of fighting," he said, presently. "They have not learnt the art of assassination. These Englishmen are boys."

Then he asked for the particulars—the exact spot, and so on, where they had found him.

Close by where the door of the schoolhouse had been Ugolino lay dead, "with his eyes well out of his head and staring blankly at the sky."

"Of all men here," said Reonardo, with a passionate outburst of rage and grief, "I could least spare him."

Then arose a hoarse cry from his band, and drawing their knives, they shook them in the air, swearing to avenge the fate of their comrade, who had been renowned for his strength and bravery.

Lucia stood by, with her hands clasped before her, calmly surveying the furious men. When they had somewhat restored themselves to quietude, she said, in a dry, sarcastic way:

"Brave talking and howling, but what will you do for revenge?"

"Leave them to my guidance," whispered Reonardo.

"And what will you do?" she asked, almost as scornfully.

"Exterminate them all!"

"Even *her*?"

"Ay, even *her*. All, I say—all!"

"Then I am here with you," said Lucia, giving him her hand; "and as for the work, depend on me to do my share of it. When *she* is caught, leave her to me."

"It shall be done," said Reonardo, but as he turned his face away his eyes gave the lie to his tongue.

CHAPTER XCIX.

LAL AND STIFF HAVE SOME STRANGE EXPERIENCES
WITH AN OLD FRIEND.



IN fear, and, it may be said, trembling, Lal Brodie and Stiff watched the approaching figure until it was within a hundred yards of them. Then a flash of light burst in upon the darkness; they recognised

him. It was Chorker!

The old fraud was walking along in the way of one who is approaching a spot where he thinks an ambush may be prepared for him. He had his eyes on the stranded vessel, and drawing nearer to it, lessened his pace until he was within forty or fifty yards of the boys, and then he came to a dead stop.

"Well," said Lal, "if this isn't a tenth wonder of the world!"

"You mean eighth," suggested Stiff.

"No, I do not. I think Jim the eighth and old Nap the ninth. Therefore Chorker must be the tenth. I wonder what he is doing here?"

"We must have grounded near where you saw them hauling us."

"No, we are not near that spot. There is nothing in our surroundings that is at all familiar."

"Shall we give the old man a scare?" inquired Stiff, after a pause.

"Yes. It will do him good," assented Lal.

It was quite a matter of faith among the boys that whatever was injurious to ordinary men's body or nerves must be good for Chorker. He was, in their eyes, the very antipodes of ordinary humanity.

It did not require much care or effort to bring about the requisite scare, for Chorker, still with his eyes on the "Orsini," came slowly along until he was almost in front of the boys, but with his back turned towards them. He gazed at the vessel in a contemplative manner for a few moments, and then gave vent to his thoughts in a speech.

"Blessed if it ain't a wreck, and deserted!" he said.

Lal motioned for Stiff to keep where he was, and stole out of his hiding-place, creeping with all the care of a professional assassin upon the unsuspecting Chorker. When he was within a few feet of him he suddenly leapt up and yelled out:

"Your money or your life!"

The effect of this startling demand upon Chorker was all that the most inveterate practical joker could desire. He first of all leapt forward, then he fell back a pace, and finally dropped upon his knees, with upraised, clasped hands.

"Have marcy on me, whoever you be!" he wailed, without so much as looking round.

Lal burst into a peal of laughter.

Chorker, recognising the familiar ring of the boy's voice, although he could not individualise the boy, turned round and saw who it was. He immediately became quite stiff with outraged dignity.

"If I'd knowed who it was," he said, "I shouldn't have took part in your practical joke."

"You couldn't help yourself," grinned Lal. "Here's Stiff, who saw the fun. Chorker says he——"

"You let Chorker alone!" interposed that outraged personage; "and perhaps you will explain how you come along here. Where's your boat?"

"There," replied Lal, pointing towards the "Orsini."

"Go to Bath with your gammon!"

"It is true. We landed here from her. It is the 'Orsini' with a fresh supply of provisions for the school."

"Purvisions!" exclaimed Chorker, with his eyes starting out of his head. "I suppose you didn't bring none of 'em ashore?"

"Indeed we did, and if you are hungry——"

"Hungry!"

It was an exclamation and a cry of agony rolled into one. It was the howl of the starved wolf in a diluted form, the moan of a starving Russian peasant.

They brought him some of the food they had ashore, and he fell upon it in a very doggy fashion. He clutched it in his hands and gnawed at it, swallowing big mouthfuls with all the haste of one perishing with want.

"You seem to enjoy it," said Lal.

"My dear boy," replied Chorker, in a mumbling way, with his mouth full, "if you had been a-livin' for a few days on seaweed and limpets, which it takes pickaxes to get 'em singly off the rocks, *you'd* be a bit wolfish."

They said it was very likely, and plied him with food and wine until he had eaten and drunk his fill. Then he sat down on the sands in a state of repletion, and pulled out his pipe.

"I've jest enough 'bacca for half a dozen whiffs left," he said, "and I feel as if I can enjoy it."

"Perhaps now you will tell me where the other three brave men are?" said Lal.

"They are over yonder," replied Chorker, "a matter of six or seven mile. I got across that rent this morning owing to the water being uncommon low in some places. Got blowed out from between the rocks with the high wind."

"When was there a high wind?" asked Stiff.

"Just afore sunrise," answered Chorker; "a reg'lar gale."

"That accounts for the 'Orsini' getting so firmly ashore," said Lal to Stiff.

"What!" exclaimed Chorker; "do you mean to say as you know nuthin' of it?"

"We were asleep at the time."

"Blessed if boys can't sleep through anything!"

"I left the others a-howling with hunger," said Chorker, "and that Mr. Storeby was a-talking about casting lots to see who was to be eaten. That was one of the reasons why I come away."

"I should think that you were perfectly safe," said Lal, eyeing him with disgust. "Who, do you think, would eat you?"

"Shoe-leather," added Stiff, "would be tender meat to you."

"I don't purfess to be no chicken," said Chorker, "but there's tougher about."

"Where?" demanded Lal.

"Anywheres," was the vague reply.

The boys conferred together on the matter of communicating with the schoolmaster and his assistants. Though not particularly fond of any one of them, neither Lal Brodie nor Stiff could leave them to starve. Finally they decided that Jim ought to be communicated with without delay, and one of them ought to make for the castle.

Lal said he would go, and Chorker could take back some food to the starving masters.

Chorker was loth to stir, he was in such a replete condition; but on being threatened with the vengeance of the boys if he did not do as he was told, he consented to carry out their wishes; so they went on board and filled a sack with biscuit and meat, which they floated ashore on a raft made by Lal, and he was despatched with it to his late companions.

As they were now pretty well sure of their position, as soon as Chorker was out of sight Lal struck out, making a bee-line for the castle across the higher ground.

He reckoned he must pass about a mile to the west of the lagoon to be with Jim by the noonday hour. With good luck they would have a party to unload the vessel by the shore before sunset, and start work the first thing in the morning.

Now Lal was not possessed of the bump of locality, and as he had to travel over broken ground, now rising to small hills and now sinking to hollows thick with brushwood, he soon lost his way. The sea was out of sight, and the castle hidden somewhere among the distant woods. He paused and looked round him when he had travelled for an hour or so, and took refuge in the commonplace action of scratching his head in doubt.

"Blest if I can be sure of my way now," he muttered; "I am inclined to think that I ought to bear more to the left. But if I do so, and it should be wrong, I shall get right out of the track, and land myself goodness knows where."

In sober truth, he got so bewildered that he could not, after a few minutes' twisting and turning about in a hesitating way, have said offhand from which direction he had come.

It was a parlous fix, and not so easily got out of, for there were no hills near of sufficient altitude for him to see far about the surrounding country. Look which way he might, there was nothing to guide him with accuracy.

"I'll try an old-fashioned trick," he muttered.

Picking up a small stick, he pointed one end of it, and holding it over his head, chanted the following refrain:

"Tell me quick, and tell me true,
Oh, stick of mine, which way to go."

He tossed it into the air and it fell. The point indicated that the path he ought to take—if there was anything in his way of seeking guidance—lay to the right.

"I don't believe it is correct," said Lal, ruefully; "but I must take your guidance. If you have lied to me, oh, stick, I'll break you in two!"

He walked on to the right until the many undulations in his path changed to smoother ground; but

on ahead he beheld some jagged rocks, and standing on the top of one of the highest, the figures of three men.

They were so far off that that they were mere little dolls to his eye; but he could shrewdly guess who they were. The trio too clearly suggested the three schoolmasters.

Almost at the same moment he became aware of a solitary figure staggering across the level at a distance of half a mile. This, of course, was Chorker, betrayed by the burden of food he bore upon his back.

It occurred to Lal that, as he had come so far out of his way, he might as well go on and have a word with the schoolmasters; so he directed his steps across the level, which, after all, was not so level as it seemed at first sight.

There were rents and cracks in the earth, unseen and unsuspected till one was close upon them—not very wide, it is true, but requiring some amount of nerve to leap over, as their depth was in many cases considerable.

At length Lal came to one too wide to be leaped over, but not so very deep, and having descended to the bottom of it by means of its craggy sides, he found quite a smooth sandy path to travel on.

It led him in the right direction, and he decided to keep to it.

As it was almost as straight as a ruled line for a considerable distance he was not likely to lose his way, and he kept to the lower road for nearly a mile, and then, as it abruptly terminated, he was obliged to climb up to higher ground.

But ere he reached the top he heard voices, and recognised the tones of the masters and Chorker, the former pleading and the latter arrogant.

It was evident that the three men must have hurried up to meet the bearer of food, and for a share in it they were now asking.

"Chorker," said Mr. Farrell, in the thin voice of a starving man, "at the peril of our lives we have crossed the water, fearing evil had befallen you. Have some consideration for us. By what strange good fortune you have come across food we know not; but, at least, as we shared other things of late, let us share in that."

"Yes," said Mr. Turner and the other undermaster together; "let us share. We are on the verge of dissolution with hunger."

"Stand orf!" cried Chorker, threateningly; "I've got a knife, and I'll use it if you come a-rushing *me*. You crossed the water, did you? Yes, when there warn't none to cross. Now, look here: I wishes to act manly and fair. I had to buy this 'ere grub, and I'll sell some of it to you."

"Sell it!" exclaimed Mr. Farrell.

"Sell it at a fair profit, in course," said Chorker. "I'll divide it into four lots, and you shall have one apiece for—all the wallables you have about you, and on one condition: that you goes back to where you was and wait till you are took orf. I'll keep on feeding you for a week, anyways."

There was a moment's silence, eventually broken by a groan.

"My watch," said Mr. Farrell, "is worth twenty pounds."

"But t'others' ain't worth five bob," returned Chorker, "an' I evens it up that way."

Some haggling ensued, but the wretched, starving men had to come to his terms. They paid over everything they were possessed of, excepting their pocket-handkerchiefs, for a share in the food.

While the transaction was being carried on, Chorker informed them that he received the supplies from "parties" it would be dangerous for them to approach, but he had found favour in the eyes of the leader by some means Chorker failed to clearly specify.

The trio may not have entirely believed him, but they were too broken-spirited to run any risk, and Lal heard them shuffle away.

Chorker remained behind, chuckling to himself over his superior cunning, and in an outspoken soliloquy let out the fact to Lal that he meant to hide the valuables he had acquired, and if asked for them at some future time, to swear that the mysterious "parties" had robbed him of them.

"As for what them boys may say," he muttered, "I don't care a fig. Nap knows they are liars. I'll swear the parties came ashore in the 'Orsini,' and that I niver set eyes on the young beggars at all."

His heavy footstep approaching the rent in the ground warned Lal to get out of the way, and slipping down, he curled himself up on the bottom, under a convenient piece of overhanging rock, one of many there, and lay still.

Chorker having waited until the trio of masters were well on their way back, ravenously eating as they walked, came creeping down to the bottom of the rent, and selecting a spot within twenty yards of Lal, scraped a hole in the sand and buried his treasure.

He marked the spot by placing two stones together, and returned to the higher ground. Shortly after he was heard by the hiding boy to be moving away.

Lal gave him ten minutes to get out of hearing, and then, emerging from his hiding-place, speedily unearthed the treasure so unworthily acquired. There were three watches, the same number of pen-knives, two pocket-books, and a handful of coins: some Spanish and some English.

Lal Brodie stowed them away in his pockets, and ascending again to the higher ground, saw Chorker seated at a distance with his back to him. The old

fraud was gratifying a long-felt want by partaking of another meal.

After it he would probably sleep, and if Lal was smart he could get to the castle and back to the "Orsini" with help ere Chorker turned up again.

He was sure of his route now, and sped away, occasionally looking back to see if Chorker had observed him. But that worthy did not change his position, and Lal, undetected, passed out of the region of his sight.

CHAPTER C.

A WELCOME MESSENGER.—A WILD MAN OF THE WOODS.



UNERRINGLY Brodie struck the castle path, meeting with no obstacle on the way. But ere he had got far up it he was suddenly challenged by a voice from the bushes on his left.

"Who goes there? Stand, or I fire!"

He recognised the voice of Joe Ganthonny, and answering his challenge with a cheery "It is only Lal Brodie," Joe in person showed himself.

"So you've come back?" he said. "Where's Stiff?"

"Miles from here," replied Lal. "Such a yarn I have to tell as you never heard."

"Have you found the 'Orsini'?"

"Yes."

"Thank goodness for that! Where is she?"

"Aground a long way from here. But I must not waste time talking to you. How are things above?"

"All right," replied Joe; "no signs of those Spanish demons, but the stiller they are the more mischief they are hatching. Jim is drilling the boys to the work of defending the forts. Hurry up, and sing as you go, as there are some young and inexperienced sentries on ahead, who may take it into their heads to let fly at you."

Lal carried out these instructions, and so securely passed Pesketh, Trimmer, and Dawson, who were on guard higher up.

They heard his voice, and came out as Joe Ganthonny had done, to ask the news. Lal Brodie gave each a few words of comfort, and hastened on to the castle.

It was a busy scene that was being enacted there, for in addition to the drilling by Jim, Morse was busy laying down a mine, which he intended, if necessary, to spring upon an advancing foe.

Glad to be free of the castle, for a short time, any-

way, all the occupants were outside sunning themselves, excepting those who were in the wood behind, cutting more fuel.

This party consisted of a dozen boys, under the command of Sam Whiffer and Macbeth. Hamlet and Romeo were engaged in the portage of the wood they cut down into the courtyard of the castle.

Lal doffed his cap to Mrs. Farrell and Eveline, who sat near the bridge engaged in the everlasting needle-work, and then turned to Jim, who, with Morse, had come forward to greet him.

Lal told the story of the finding of the "Orsini," and all listened to him in breathless silence. For the present he confined the part of it concerning Chorker to the fact that he had seen him and supplied his wants.

"Mr. Farrell," said Lal, addressing Mrs. Farrell, "has, I am afraid, had a very rough time of it over there."

"It will do him no harm," was the complacent reply; "and I should say he is as safe there as he could be anywhere on the island."

Now came the question as to the stores in the stranded "Orsini."

"It would never do to leave any of them on board," said Jim, "and at present we can only bring a portion up here. All the heavy bales and packages must be left to a more fitting time."

"You would suggest," said Morse, "that they be got ashore and hidden somewhere?"

"Yes, all save what we can get up here. But it will entail a lot of us leaving here for a good two days."

"I was in hopes that you would be able to get everything here in a day," said Lal.

"Look at the distance," said Jim, "and there is a lot of uphill work, and we may be attacked if our presence over yonder is known. I think that I ought to remain here." He cast a wistful glance at Eveline, who shook her head. "Well, if not myself, Morse must remain. We cannot have any more artillery experiments."

"As if it is likely there would be!" indignantly exclaimed Terry, who was standing by.

"There is no knowing what military genius may lead some of us to do," said Jim, with mock gravity. "Well, the sooner we are gone the better. Work in the forts must be suspended, and, with a weakened force, Morse, you had better keep in the castle. I shall want the men with me to assist in the heavier portion of unloading."

Martin was summoned from the fort, and bidden to get the other men ready. All to be armed with rifles and a fair supply of ammunition.

"Thirty of the strongest boys," said Jim, "I must have. Terry, you will go with me, and I can pick up Ganthony as we go down. Fall in, there!"

The boys near him fell in, and he rapidly picked out those he wanted. They were selected mainly for their physique.

The next thing was to give them rations for one meal, which they would require on their way.

This was seen to by Terry, and Morse looked to their arms. Then Jim had a few words with Morse, exchanged a whisper with Eveline, and he was ready.

"If all goes well," he said, "you will see some of us back to-morrow afternoon. Keep the gates closed till we come."

There was no attempt at cheering, lest the noise should attract their enemies; but with a quiet waving of caps the detachment set out for the "Orsini."

The sentries, all but Ganthony, were soon in, and Morse was about to call in the wood-cutters, when the whole body came dashing down, with three niggers at their head yelling in alarm.

"Get into the castle, Mrs. Farrell," said Morse, quickly. "Now then, what is all this row about?"

"A wild man ob de woods," gasped Macbeth. "He do him lebel best to eat Massa Dibble."

"All in!" cried Morse, suspecting a possible attack upon them.

The boys poured over the bridge, through the gateway, into the castle. Morse waited to the last, keeping a watchful eye around, but no stranger appeared in sight.

Still, there was some cause for the alarm, as Dibble, as he hastened into the castle, was holding his left arm with his right hand, as boys do when they have received a blow or some form of injury.

Morse closed the gates, bolted and barred them, and let down the portcullis. Then he walked into the courtyard, where there was a scene of confusion, all there, including Mrs. Farrell and Eveline, seemingly talking and nobody listening.

As for Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo, they were rolling their eyes and gesticulating after the manner of their race when excited, while they were being plied with questions by quite a mob of boys who had been at work in the forts.

Morse could be very authoritative when he chose, and his stern demand for silence was soon complied with. "I wish," he said, "that all of you, when anything unusual happens, would try to keep cool."

"We are not all of the Morse family," pleaded Whiffer.

"Well," said Morse, "let me know what has transpired. Dibble, let me hear you first."

"I was cutting wood," said Dibble, "a little outside the rest——"

"Dat you war, and me see you," murmured Macbeth.

"As I was picking up a bundle of sticks I had put together——"

"Tied wif a piece ob woodbine," explained Macbeth.

"Can't you keep your ole spoke out ob it?" demanded Romeo. "It was me see it all, and me sabe de boy. Now den?"

"Silence, the pair of you!" cried Morse. "Go on, Dibble."

"I had just picked up the bundle," said Dibble, "when a gaunt, fierce-looking man, covered all over with leaves for clothing, jumped out from behind the trunk of a tree, and laying hold of me, fastened his teeth on my arm. He bit the cloth nearly through. Here are the holes in it that his teeth made."

And he exhibited the sleeve of his jacket in proof of the accuracy of his statement.

Judging by the rest of the story, Dibble would have been torn in pieces but for Romeo, who, with a stout stick, rushed to Dibble's aid.

The wild man fled, but so great was the panic his appearance created, that the whole party retreated in confusion to the castle, as described.

There was no doubt about the matter. It was no false alarm, but beyond the fact that it *was* a man, and his garb mainly of a leafy order, Morse could get no particulars of this strange visitant.

It could not be one of their known assailants, of that Morse was assured, and he for the time could make nothing of the story beyond what he had heard.

"We had better all lie close in the castle," he said, "until Jim returns. Meanwhile, a lookout must be kept from every point."

In pursuance of this resolve he selected sentries, and himself took up a position on the ramparts. While he was looking from thence to the lower ground, it struck him that after all the range of vision was limited—how much better view could be obtained from one of the tower summits.

But the two highest towers had never been ascended, for the doors at the point where they sprang from the ramparts had been secured ages before in so strong a manner that the boys had not attempted to open them.

"Why should I not try it now?" thought Morse, and the next moment he was resolved that the attempt should be made, for to seriously think of a thing was for him to decide upon it.

If there were nothing to be found beyond these lower doors, a look-out could be established on the summit of one of them.

That would be of great advantage to the occupants of the castle, for a view could be obtained of the greater part of that side of the island—no small thing when a foe is expected.

CHAPTER CL.

UNLOADING THE "ORSINI."—CHORKER FINDS HIMSELF OUT IN THE COLD.



SWIFTLY the boys hastened from the region of the castle, walking in silence until they had put two miles or so between them and the ruins of the school-house. Then, when they began to talk, Lal Brodie enlightened Jim as to the conduct of

that arch old humbug, Chorker.

"When I get near him," Jim said, "he will receive a bit of my mind."

"Why not absolutely refuse to have anything to do with him?" suggested Lal. "In short, to use a vulgar expression, why not give him the chuck?"

"I think I shall," replied Jim, "not on account of what he did to those duffers, Farrell and Co., but to worry the old skunk. I think they all behaved like arrant curs."

"What shall we do with the watches and other things?"

"Keep them for the present, Lal."

From Lal's description of the route he had taken, and the mistake he made therein, Jim judged what line across the island to take. He was as richly endowed with the bump of locality as Brodie was poor in that respect.

It wanted yet an hour and a half to sunset, when from a rising piece of ground they sighted the shore, with the "Orsini" lying as Lal Brodie had left her. A glance revealed the fact that there were no strangers on board, and so far all was well.

They hastened on, and presently sighted Stiff standing on a rock, glancing anxiously in their direction. As soon as he espied the advancing band, he raced towards them, and was busy for a minute shaking hands with the foremost.

"I have had a high old time of it since you went away, Lal," he said.

"Found it lonely?" suggested Lal.

"Of course. It was beastly for the first hour or two. But that is not the worst. Early in the afternoon a small felucca came along and had a look at the 'Orsini.'"

"Jehoshaphat!"

"There was only a woman in her," said Stiff, "and she made no attempt to get on board; but she hovered about, and had a good look at her before she went off."

I could not get near enough to see her face, but I reckon, Jim, that it was the Spanish girl you know—Lucia di Valo!"

"Bother her!" muttered Jim; "it is unfortunate she should spot the ship. But we may still have time to clear off her cargo."

"And that isn't all," pursued Stiff; "about——"

"One moment," interposed Jim. "Did the woman see you?"

"To tell the truth," said Stiff, looking rather sheepish, "I skulked behind the rocks and did not show myself. You know I am not a bit of a ladies' man."

"A good excuse," said Lal; "but you did right."

"Quite right," said Jim. "But you have more to tell us?"

"About an hour ago," said Stiff, "that old beast Chorker came back, and he's gone on board, kindly informing me before starting that if either Lal or myself ventured to show on the deck he would brain us."

"Where is he now?"

"Below, rummaging about, I guess. He thinks he is perfectly safe, as he does not know that Lal went off to the castle."

"All right," said Jim; "we will give him a bit of a shaking up."

He asked how deep the water was, and hearing it was easily waded through, he led the way, asking all to follow him and be as silent as they could be.

Without speaking the boys waded out to the vessel and climbed quietly on deck one after the other.

By holding their rifles aloft they kept them dry until on board, where by Jim's direction they laid them carefully on deck.

Then he and Lal and Stiff went below to the aft-cabin, where they felt pretty sure of finding Chorker. Their surmise was correct. He was in the chief cabin smoking a cigar which he had discovered in a box with many more.

Jim held back and the other two entered the cabin. Immediately on seeing them Chorker sprang up with the roar of an angry lion.

"What did I tell you?" he cried. "Off here you go, and keep ashore as you vally your lives!"

"Chorker," remonstrated Lal, in mock humility, "have a little mercy on us. How would you like to sleep ashore alone?"

"Not at all, and I'm not going to do it," was the fierce reply; "there's two of you. Cut it!"

"At least," urged Stiff, "let us take some provisions ashore."

"You've been eating and stuffing all day," roared Chorker. "Boys is never satisfied. Off you go!"

"Stop a bit," said Jim, showing himself in the doorway; "there are others who have a voice in the matter. Chorker, you are a miserable old beast!"

"You will excuse me, Master Gordon," said Chorker, with an effort to appear dignified, "but though even you are here—and how you came aboard is a mystery to me—I don't see why I should be trodden quite in the dust."

"There are thirty of us on board," said Jim, composedly, "and you will please take yourself off and sleep ashore."

"But Mister Gordon——"

"If you do not clear out right away I will call the fellows down and you will be pitched over the side."

"Well," said Chorker, "if I must go I must; but if I take a few smokes——"

"Let that cigar-box alone," said Jim. "You must do without your smokes."

"Well, then," said Chorker, with assumed cheerfulness, "I'll take summat to eat and drink ashore——"

"He has been stuffing all day," said Lal, gravely. "In that respect he beats boys hollow."

"You will go as you are," said Jim, "and clear off so that there is a good two miles between your carcass and ourselves. We are armed, and if you come a step nearer without permission you will be shot."

"Sen' I may live," muttered Chorker, "if iver a party rode the 'igh 'oss you do."

He shuffled out of the cabin, and they followed him to the deck.

Finding that Jim's assertion was true as to numbers, Chorker hopped over the side with commendable alacrity.

His movements were hastened on his looking back by seeing several rifles covering him. He had a suspicion that it was done in jest, but he dared not risk it, and as soon as he gained the shore he started off like a champion walker competing against time.

"We shall see no more of him to-night," said Jim. "Now, boys, to work. We will get all we can on deck while daylight lasts and convey it ashore to-morrow. I daresay you are hungry, but we can grub after dark, and a little waiting won't kill anybody."

With willing hearts and hands the boys went to work. Half-a-dozen tumbled down into the hold ready to fasten ropes that were lowered to the boxes and bales, and with many a merry word and snatch of song the boys laboured until the sun was down and the stars were shining brightly aloft.

CHAPTER CII.

EMPTYING THE "ORSINI."—SOME OTHER THINGS COME TO LIGHT.



AFTER a jolly evening, followed by a night of peaceful repose, the boys were up with the sun and ready for breakfast, which they all helped in preparing.

The deck, with its piled-up masses of goods, was a sight worthy of an unloading in the London docks, and from the forehold a quantity of planking had been brought up which Jim intended to fashion into a raft to convey the goods ashore.

Jim had found a good ship's telescope, which he used at once to scan the shore in search of Chorker. He was some time in discovering him, but eventually made out the well-known figure of the old fraud, seated on a distant rock with his nose between his knees, in an uneasy sleep.

"Take him some grub," said Jim to Joe Ganthony, "and tell him to go further away. It will be as well to hide from him where we store the cargo."

Ganthony executed his very congenial task with all speed, and Chorker vanished out of sight. By that time the rest of the boys had finished breakfast and the raft was begun.

It was not necessary to make it very strong. A dozen planks lashed well together sufficed, for only the goods would be placed upon it and conveyed to the shore by boys wading and pushing their crude conveyance.

Jim having learnt many valuable lessons of late, did not neglect the obvious duty of keeping a good lookout for strangers who might intrude upon them. Three boys armed like military sentries were sent to different points ashore, and a watch was kept upon the sea. Then, with coats and waistcoats off, the main body went to work in a style that would have shamed ordinary unloading gangs, unless the men were on piece-work.

There was a lot to do, and the dinner-hour arrived with still half the hold to empty. Then the heat of the day set in, and they took two hours' rest. After it to work again, drawing up the boxes and bales and conveying them ashore on the raft, until there was sufficient for the boys for six months.

Jim, ashore, thoughtfully walked among the piles of goods, and realised how utterly impossible it would be to convey the lot to the castle under a week's time, unless the whole school could be pressed into the labour.

He expressed this view to Martin, who coincided with it, and then came the question, What was to be done?

"If we could find some place handy for storage," said Martin, thoughtfully, "and take back with us a few things that we want pressingly, it would be all right. Later on we could get the things up yonder by degrees."

"A cave might help us," said Jim, his eyes ranging along the shore; "but this seems hardly the kind of coast for one that would serve us."

"Shall I look ahead, sir?"

"Well, you might."

Martin went on his errand, and Jim hastened on the boys, for he felt a presentiment that they might ere long be interrupted. He argued to himself also that, anyway, it was essential he and his assistants should get back to the castle as soon as possible, where their return would be naturally anxiously watched for.

The voice of Ganthony, who was superintending the clearing of the hold, aroused him from a train of thought, and looking across the narrow span of water between the shore and the ship, he saw him beckoning for Jim to come on board.

"Anything the matter?" he cried.

"We've got all our goods out," replied Ganthony.

"That's all right. Then come ashore and give us a hand."

"The hold isn't empty," said Ganthony; "there's another cargo under ours. I want you to look at it before we hoist it up."

Jim, wondering what the other portion of the cargo could consist of, waded through the water and climbed on board. Waffle and the other men who had been doing the hauling up were squatted round the entrance to the hold, smoking their pipes.

"How do you know the goods don't belong to us?" asked Jim.

"Well, sir," said Waffle, "everything we have hoisted up at present have got 'N. F.' on 'em. The other goods have 'G. T. H.' and different crosses and signs."

Jim dropped into the hold and took a look at the rest of the stores. He saw at a glance that the things were not intended for the school.

"Whatever they may be they are worth saving," he said, "especially as we must be here for another night. We can run them ashore, and should an owner turn up he can have his property on paying salvage money. If no owner comes to light we can consider the things ours."

The majority of the packages were smaller than those for the school, and in most cases the contents were very light. It was certain that there was no bullion among them.

There were at least two hundred in all, but, owing to their not being very heavy, they were soon piled up on deck, and ready for transmission ashore.

As the school stores were all landed out in time, Jim gave the word for the strange parcels to follow, but to be kept distinct.

When he had seen the first load put on the raft, he raised his eyes, and saw Martin returning, so he dropped off the vessel, and hastened ashore to receive his report.

CHAPTER CIII.

STORING IN THE CAVE.—LATE VISITORS TO THE "ORSINI."



"It is all right, Mr. Gordon," said Martin; "found the very thing that is wanted. Over yonder, not a furlong from here, I came across a hole just big enough for a chap to crawl through on his hands and knees. So in I goes, and there I find

quite a cave, forty feet square if an inch, very low, but high enough for us. I reckon that the highest part of the roof is about a foot over my head."

"I hope it won't fall down upon us," said Jim, grimly.

"We can prop it up with the boxes," said Martin, facetiously. "But come along and see it afore you start on storing in it."

The entrance to the cave was insignificant, and, being immediately behind a jutting stone, a passer-by not looking for anything special would in all probability fail to heed it. Martin had passed it in the first instance, and it was only on his return, having failed to find a cave higher up, that he noticed it.

It was a strange sort of cave, and Jim was of opinion that it was not, as most seashore caves are, naturally formed. There was a suspicious squareness about it that led to a contrary view of its origin. But there were no indications of its having been recently occupied, and it was as good a place as they could wish for as a secret storing-place for the cargo.

"We can easily block up the mouth," said Jim, "and, unless somebody in the know turns up, everything will be safe."

They had about four hours' daylight, and a young moon that would not set until ten o'clock, to help them along. Jim thought that with a little extra push he could have everything in the cave by that hour.

With such support as he had, the feat—for feat it

was in a labouring sense—was accomplished within a quarter of an hour of the time, and the tired boys lay about on the sands outside the cave, eating their well-earned supper, soothed by the soft warmth of an incomparable autumn night.

The first things packed in the cave were the goods belonging to the unknown "G. T. H." It was the purpose of Jim to leave them there, even after they had conveyed the school stores to the castle.

Next came the heavy packages, and finally such things as they intended to take back with them on the morrow.

There was still ample room for the boys to sleep, and as the cave was dry and warm, it was decided that there they should pass the night. Some were inclined to return to the "Orsini," but Jim objected to it.

"The 'Orsini,'" he said, "can take care of herself now, for a time, anyway."

An hour after, all the boys and men were asleep in the cave, and Jim, as their leader, occupied a position near the entrance. He was a light sleeper, and had not slept long when a sound of voices reached his ears.

He started up and listened. The speakers were some distance away—on the sea, he judged; and creeping out of the cave, he looked about him, and saw a light flashing on the deck of the "Orsini."

His first thought was that it was Chorker, but he dismissed it instantly as highly improbable. Turning back for a moment, he softly asked, "Is anyone awake here?" and getting no answer, stole out alone, determined not to arouse anyone unless there was imperative need.

Keeping close to the low rocks and walking with a stoop, he got back to the spot where the cargo had been piled ashore. There was some litter about still, but nothing to attract attention from the ship in the night-time.

The origin of the voices was soon manifest to him. The stars gave sufficient light for him to see the outline of the stranded vessel, and in addition there were two boats drawn up to her side also discernible. On board the "Orsini" were several men and one woman. Jim made out the voice of the latter, and recognised the musical tones of Lucia di Valo.

"Just in time," he thought, with a glow of pride. "Done them, the Spanish beggars!"

Lying flat upon the sands, he slowly crept down right to the edge of the water, from whence he could make out the utterances of the men. He soon gathered that they had been in league with the captain of the "Orsini" to rob the vessel of her stores, to embarrass the school, and that one and all were exceedingly puzzled at finding her in such a plight, with no crew on board and not the slightest information as to what had become of them.

The loss of the cargo had also been discovered, and the view taken of it by the Spaniards was that the captain of the "Orsini" had plundered the vessel for his own benefit, and was skulking somewhere ashore.

They threatened vengeance—"after they had done with the little wolves in the castle"—and then began to talk in a jargon Jim could not understand—on other matters, he supposed.

They had found some drink, having an unerring scent for anything in that line, and having lighted two more lamps, lay down upon the deck to gamble. Presently—it was a matter of a few minutes only—the voice of Lucia was heard upbraiding them.

"You have nothing to keep you here," she said. "To your boats, and back again."

They pleaded they were tired and needed rest, but promised to start in an hour or so.

There was a gentle breeze blowing at the time, which Lucia told them would fall to nothing with the rising of the sun, and a calm of some hours might be expected. But they doggedly refused to stir.

"You would not dare to disobey me," she said, bitterly, "if Reonardo were here."

"Reonardo would let us rest," they said, "and not give unreasonable commands."

"Enough," said Lucia, haughtily. "I will leave you."

They laughed by way of reply, and a minute later Jim dimly saw her small craft slowly sailing seaward. The men continued to play on, getting more boisterous each moment in their mirth.

"Now," thought Jim, "if I leave these fellows they will lie until daylight, and I shall have them prowling about the shore, which won't quite suit my book. They must be cleared out at once."

He thought a moment, and his plans were laid.

Back he glided to the cave, and awakening Martin, Ganthony, Terry, and a few more, told them of the discovery he had made.

"Now," he said, "you boys get your rifles, and we will steal down and let fly at those fellows. Probably we shall do very little mischief at this time of the night, but if we don't scare those ruffians out of the neighbourhood I'm mistaken."

Eight in all, with loaded rifles, crept out of the cave. Terry was left behind to allay any alarm among those who still slept, and who might be awakened by the firing.

The Spaniards were still drinking and gambling, and were getting hilarious when the eight armed boys, with Martin, formed on the shore.

"Aim just above her hull," whispered Jim. "Now—all ready. Fire!"

The crash of arms on the stillness of the night was as of a regiment's volley-firing. The men ceased their mirth, and with yells sprang to their feet, and

they were heard tumbling into their two boats with an utter regardlessness of possible broken limbs.

"One shout now," said Jim, "all together. Make a good ferocious yell of it. Let it have a Spanish twang."

The yell they gave in concert would have scared an Indian, and the terrified Spaniards pushed off their boats and hoisted the felucca sails with an alacrity they rarely exhibited.

"Shall we give them another volley?" whispered Martin.

The rifles had all been reloaded while the Spaniards were hurriedly embarking. Jim reflected a moment, and then said: "Yes, the sooner we wipe out those villains the better."

The boats had not got far away when the second volley was fired, but in the dim light they were not so discernible as when on the hull of the "Orsini." But that some good work was done was testified by a shrieking that followed the firing.

"Now they may go," said Jim, "and I think they will be wary of coming this way again."

By this time all the boys, and the rest of the men, were awake and outside the cave. When the firing party returned, and told the story of the success of their short expedition, a shout rang out that must have created additional terror in the breasts of the scared Spaniards.

As there was not the slightest probability of their returning, the party went back to the cave, and all sought rest to recruit their strength for the labours of the morrow.

CHAPTER CIV.

ON THE ROAD HOME.—THE LOST SHEEP RETURNS TO THE FLOCK.



"FLOUR, tea, cocoa, and tinned meat," said Jim, "are the chief things wanted. Let each of you select as much as you can carry, and we will start at once. The flour had in the first instance been packed in bags of a convenient size, and the boys who thought they could carry one selected their burden." The others took what they believed they were capable of bearing, and the men did not shirk their share.

Of course many halts by the way would be imperative, and they did not expect to reach the castle

much before sunset. So, in addition to their load, they carried rations for the day. But Jim was wise in one arrangement he permitted them to make. It was that they should carry all, and he as leader bear nothing.

"We must have somebody to look about and scout round a bit," said Martin, "and that is your line, sir."

"Very good," assented Jim; "but remember that I am quite willing to take my share of the work. I can, at least, occasionally relieve one of you who tires."

The cave was closed up with rocks and sand, so that it was effectually concealed from anything but keen observation, and walking in a line, with Jim at the head, the cavalcade started.

It was an odd sight to see so many youngsters and men each with a burden on his back or shoulder. They presented the appearance of a marauding party homeward bound with spoil.

They talked, of course, but not so freely as they would have done without their burdens, and they were merrier than toilers usually are in the height of their labours. Jim picked the easiest road, and they got along famously, an entire hour passing ere a halt was called.

By that time many were getting pumped, and they dropped their burdens to the ground, and then lay down beside them. They were at this juncture on the summit of one of the low hills which Lal Brodie had crossed two days before. It commanded a view of the rolling country between there and the lagoon.

Suddenly, as Brodie had seen on a previous occasion put on record, he beheld several figures on the summit of a slope, and, as he had done, recognised them. There were four of them, and they were the valiant men who had been stranded on the shore of the outer rocks of the lagoon. Moreover, he was conscious that, even as they had recognised them, they had seen and recognised the party.

Jim was not afraid of meeting with the schoolmaster, and he was glad for some reasons that that worthy had not perished. He merely mentioned what he had seen, and bade his friends await their coming.

As an additional half-hour's rest was welcome, the boys waited, and presently, headed by Napoleon, the four men arrived at the spot.

Napoleon Farrell was on his loftiest pedestal, and he gave the party a cold and haughty greeting. At the same time it was evident that he was very hungry.

"Gordon," he said, "I will thank you for something to eat."

"You can have a part of our rations, sir," replied Jim, cheerfully; "but as we are going to the castle, and there is a great deal of work to be done, I must impose a condition."

"I am not accustomed to making conditions with my pupils," said Mr. Farrell, haughtily.

"The idea of it!" said Chorker.

"You be quiet," said Mr. Farrell, eyeing him angrily; "you are as impertinent as the rest. You lied to me about meeting with strangers."

"I was sworn on to the lie," murmured Chorker.

Storeby and Turner said nothing, but stood by looking gloomily on, and sympathetically rubbing their stomachs.

"I don't understand what you mean, sir," said Jim, "but I adhere to giving food to you on one condition."

"Name it," said Mr. Farrell, eyeing him with a basilisk stare.

"You must assist in carrying these bags and parcels to the castle."

"I decline," said Mr. Farrell, haughtily.

"Fall in there!" cried Jim; "shoulder burdens. March!"

"Here—hi!" exclaimed the schoolmaster, "how dare you? Boys, stop, I insist!"

But they were already on the march, and when the schoolmaster would have stopped the nearest, Martin put his burly form between.

"Mr. Farrell," he said, evenly, "there is only one in command here *now*, and you've got to obey him."

"If I must, I must!" said Mr. Farrell, staring at the resolute face of the blacksmith. "Hunger brings even the boldest of us to terms. I yield, and leave the matter for future consideration."

"You must promise never to consider it in the future at all," said Jim.

"The conditions," almost howled Mr. Farrell, "are utterly preposterous. If I were use——"

"Mr. Farrell," said Storeby, "for myself and Mr. Turner, I yield. We are quite ready to do our share of work."

Jim immediately called a halt and collected a portion of some of the rations, and handed the mass to the undermasters. They fell upon the food ravenously. Mr. Farrell stood gloomily apart, and Chorker scrubbed his chin thoughtfully, anxious to yield for his personal comfort, and yet, as a matter of personal pride desirous of holding out.

Taking the loads from the shoulders of two of the boys, Jim placed them on the backs of the two masters, and commanded that the journey be resumed. Mr. Farrell melted as wax in the presence of so much resolve.

"I can only suppose, Gordon," he said, "that the exigency of the position has led you to forget what is due to me, and I accept your terms."

"I cannot call another halt," said Jim, coolly, "for time is precious with us. But you can have some food, and eat it as we go along."

Mr. Farrell groaned, and muttered something that sounded very much like a curse, but he accepted food even under the additional disadvantages, and Martin, obeying a sign from Jim, transferred a bag of flour from another of the boys for him to bear. Chorker still held out, for he had been fed since the masters had partaken of the supply he gave them—at a price.

But for all that he was naturally a heavy feeder—"grubber" was the word he used when speaking of it—and seeing the way Mr. Farrell enjoyed his rations, the carnal appetite of the wolf-villain came so much to the front that he had to yield.

"I gives in," he said, suddenly; "hand me out summat to eat, and I'll carry what you likes in reason."

But no answer was vouchsafed to him. Jim and the rest marched steadily on.

"I mentioned," said Chorker, with bated breath, after a pause, "as I was willin' to give in."

"You are too late," replied Jim, curtly; "we cannot halt any more, and we can do without you."

Chorker turned from him to Martin, and was met by a stony stare. Nobody else seemed to care to look at him at all.

"This is rum treatment," said Chorker.

"If you do not like it," said Jim, "you have your remedy. Go back again."

"Mr. Farrell," said Chorker, "I was a friend to you, and saved you—"

"You robbed me of my watch and valuables," said Mr. Farrell, fiercely, "which you recently told me had been paid over to some ruffians for the food you gave me. Now it seems that you received your supplies from these boys. I ask them if they are possessed of these things?"

"And of mine, too?" cried the other masters.

"It is a preposterous question, sir," said Jim; "the food was despatched to you by Brodie and Stiff. The idea that it would ever be charged for never entered their thoughts. It was a swindle."

Mr. Farrell dropped his burden and went for Chorker.

"Give me my watch, you villain!" he roared.

The next moment the other masters were upon the staggered Chorker. They threw him down, yelling out for the return of their valuables, and they turned his pockets inside out, finding nothing worth a sixpence.

"Lemme go," pleaded Chorker; "don't be 'ard on a poor unforteneted old man who is givin' to joking. I never meant to keep 'em."

"Where are the watches?" hissed the schoolmaster, banging Chorker's head upon the ground.

"I put 'em in a gully up yonder," said Chorker. "I can fetch 'em in a hour."

"Let him go and fetch them, Mr. Farrell, with an understanding that until he is ready to bring them

back he does not come near any of us," advised Jim, who with the rest of the cavalcade had halted to witness the mauling of Chorker with unalloyed pleasure.

"I yield to you, Gordon," said the schoolmaster, letting go of Chorker's throat, and rising to his feet. "Go, you hound! You know the conditions."

"As I only tuk 'em and buried 'em for a joke," said Chorker, as he was released and got upon his feet, "there ain't no 'arm done in acceptin' them conditions. I swear I won't come back till I've got them there watches and things to hand back honorably to you."

"Get away," said Jim. "Mr. Farrell, we really can waste no more time. Fall in all there. Ready—march!"

Away they went, leaving Chorker behind them. He stood still for a minute or more, watching their retreating figures with an eye compared to which that of an angry serpent was both serene and loving. Then a few words of vain regret tumbled from his lips.

"Things," he said, "ain't worked out quite reg'lar 'cordin to the 'riginal design. But a bargain is a bargain, Mr. Farrell, and I'll have summat out of you in place of the watch. I wish I'd knowed how matters was agoin' to work out, and you wouldn't have caught me a-elping you back to your friends, you three. I'd ha' left you to starve by the lagoon, and be blowed to you."

But he was not particularly downcast, as he saw the way of putting everything right. It was being done in the long-run that worried him. Still, as he believed, the watches could be unearthed and returned to their owners, and there would be an end to the matter.

But time pressed. If he wished to recover his buried treasure, and catch the party up before the castle was reached, he must hurry, and with this conviction strong upon him, he hastened off to the rent in the earth which he had made his hiding-place.

CHAPTER CV.

JIM'S RETURN TO THE CASTLE.—ADVANCE OF ESPARDO REONARDO AND HIS MEN.—THE DEFENCE OF THE FORTS.



FROM the summit of one of the two tallest towers Morse had espied the party returning. But it was at so great a distance that he did not perceive the three schoolmasters were with the boys.

Morse had succeeded in forcing, by means of blast-

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



The Island School.



"Never in all my life," said the newcomer, "have I had such a time—tramping over the sea with a pair of jabbering idiots, who can't speak a word of the easiest language under the sun—English."

ing off the lock, the door of the tower, and it will suffice for the present to state that he found a winding staircase leading to the top. He ascended it, passing on his way several landings, where there were doors also locked, and belonging to chambers which he did not attempt to inspect, but left them as tid-bits to enjoy in Jim's company when he came back.

It was getting towards night, for what with various haltings, and the boys tiring more than they expected, darkness must fall ere the gates of the castle opened to welcome back the gallant band.

Morse descended below, and called the boys together, and told them the good news, doubly welcome because the absence of Jim and those with him had extended beyond the time arranged, and not a little anxiety was felt on their account.

And there was one in the castle whom Morse knew had been especially anxious. It was Eveline, whom Morse in person sought in the part of the castle which she occupied with her mother. He found them in a chamber with bare stone walls and furnished with rather a meagre assortment of necessaries, with their hands folded before them. They were discussing Jim, and in their many natural apprehensions even the knitting-needles were laid aside.

"You bring good news?" cried Eveline, springing up, and eagerly scanning his face.

"They will be here in an hour," said Morse.

On the impulse of the moment, Eveline felt inclined to kiss him, as the bearer of good tidings, but she checked herself, and merely shook him by the hand. Mrs. Farrell was also delighted, and they went up to the tower with Morse to see if they could get a glimpse of the wanderers.

It was a toilsome journey to perform, but Eveline made light of it. She was indeed the first to reach the summit, and she was just in time to catch a glimpse of the tail-end of the party ere the woods and slope hid them from view.

It was getting dusk, for the sun was down, and she could not distinguish anyone clearly, but she fancied she saw Jim, and waved her hand on speculation. To her great delight, the salute was returned.

Mrs. Farrell arrived in time to be too late, but she was satisfied with Eveline's assurance that she had seen Jim, and he had seen her.

"And they are all carrying something," she said, "so we shall not starve for the present, mamma."

The hubbub and excitement down among the boys was intense, and Morse, on going below, found that the gates had been opened, and some of the boldest gone down to meet the returning party.

"Hang it!" muttered Morse, "just like boys. Risky, but it can't be helped."

He waited patiently for their return, and was glad when he heard the hum of voices as the boys came

up the path, the last out of the castle assisting those who were weary of their burdens.

"A complete success," said Jim, and he grasped Morse's extended hand; "but a lot of things to tell you. Farrell and the two other masters are behind."

"Good heavens!"

"We must make the best of them. But I, for one, will have no more nonsense from Farrell or anyone."

"Quite right. Go on; I think you will find Eveline in the banqueting-room."

Jim lost no time in seeking Eveline. He found her and Mrs. Farrell, too. Hearty greetings were exchanged between them, and then Jim told them of Mr. Farrell's return.

"Evy," said Mrs. Farrell, "I think I had better not meet him here, or you, dear, either. We had better retire to our rooms."

It was a wise step to take, for the meeting between husband and wife could not be very agreeable. Every time Mr. Farrell took a step of the nature he had last shown, he inevitably sank in the estimation of his wife and daughter.

Mrs. Farrell especially felt it, for she was obliged to admit that if her husband had remained in charge of the school, all would ere now have been sacrificed to the Spaniards.

The lives of the entire body within the castle-walls had been saved by the courage and ability of two mere boys, Gordon and Morse.

Struggle as she might against the feeling, she could do no less than despise the man she had vowed at the altar to love and obey.

Presently all were in, and the castle-gates closed. The big hall was filled with an excited throng, exchanging notes on the events of the past day or so. All but Chorker were there, and he, for reasons that are obvious, had failed to overtake the party. As long as daylight lasted, that hapless old sinner was busy looking for the things he had buried.

He went back to the right place, sure enough, but failing to find what he had hidden, it dawned upon him that he had mistaken the place. So he went prowling up and down that narrow rent in the earth, scraping and scratching at every likely spot, and finding nothing, to his overwhelming despair.

At the time they were making merry in the hall he was squatted on the sand in the narrow rift, a prey to overwhelming fears. The "joke" he had played at the schoolmaster's expense had taken a very serious turn.

Whatever was the nature of the interview between Mr. Farrell and his wife, it was very short. He came down from her presence with a very ruffled look, but dogged withal. He was master there, and the closed gates of the castle gave his weak nature another chance of displaying his sham courage.

The hall was filled with the boys and men, partaking of an evening meal, without any attempt at the old order of things. Mr. Farrell regarded them with a frown. He called for silence, and, from sheer force of habit, he was obeyed.

"It is astonishing," he said, "that as soon as the head of a house is gone, so soon disorder sets in. The sight of this hall to-night is a sinful contrast to the order I maintained at school."

He paused, and there was some murmuring, which Jim stilled with a word. Turning to Mr. Farrell, he quietly addressed him thus:

"I am afraid, sir, that other matters besides your absence have contributed to the slight disorder you refer to. To-morrow I will take care that there is an improvement."

"You will take care there is an improvement?"

"Yes, sir. I have been elected commander of the castle."

"Well, then," said Mr. Farrell, hotly, "I depose you. I am commander here."

There was another silence, all in expectancy of what Jim would do. Some thought he would openly rebel against the old authority. He was thoughtful for a few moments, then resumed:

"You have the right to claim the position, sir, but I think you will be wise if you leave things as they are, until we are able to resume the school."

"It will be resumed to-morrow, Gordon."

"Impossible, sir."

"I say it shall be resumed," insisted Mr. Farrell. "It is true that we have *had* enemies to contend with, but I think, with a little diplomacy, matters can be arranged. Should the Spaniards appear before the castle, I will confer with them to that end. If, as I believe, we shall be no more molested, we can return to our ordinary life, and in future the castle will serve for a schoolhouse. Indeed, I think it is admirably adapted for it."

The self-sufficiency of the man was boundless. It bordered on an exasperating form of idiocy, and the murmuring began again. Jim did not check it this time, but sat down and quietly bade Terry, who was by his side, call a council in the kitchen within the next half-hour.

"We must decide what to do," he said. "Farrell, if allowed to have his own way, will ruin and sacrifice everything."

"What have you in your mind, Jim?" asked Terry.

"With Farrell in the castle, there will be no fighting. He will give up everything—sell us all to save his own skin."

Terry passed round the hall, where, Mr. Farrell having retired again, there was an angry discussion going on, and, calling the Ten together, they slipped out in a body to the kitchen.

CHAPTER CVI.

THE ALARM.—A DESPERATE FRAY.



THE niggers were in the kitchen when the boys trooped in, and they rose in some haste, wondering what the visit portended.

"We want a place to have a few minutes' quiet chat in," said Jim; "do you mind leaving us to our-

selves for a little while?"

"You sure you up to no fun wif de sarspins and tings?" said Macbeth, doubtfully.

"Am dis de time for fun, ole cattermunk?" asked Romeo; "dere neber was a man make a speclal ob himself like you, 'cept"—adding this for the benefit of Hamlet—"it am my fader."

"Speclal yourself," indignantly exclaimed Macbeth. "All dis come ob your fader spearing the de rod to bile de child. Hamlet, am you ready?"

They were all ready, and left the kitchen. Jim closed the door and sat down by it. The others took seats anywhere—on the table, on the boxes, where they could.

Jim lost no time in laying his views before them. He was certain that Mr. Farrell would give up the castle to Espardo Reonardo if he appeared before it, unless he was restrained. To do that effectually, he must be made a prisoner.

"But that won't do," said Jim, "because he *is* the master, and if we are victorious, we shall still have an enemy to deal with. One thing only remains to be done."

He paused, and they waited in silence for his plan. Terry alone had an inkling of it.

"We must make up a band of trustworthy fellows to the number of sixty or thereabouts, and be prepared, on the first sign of the coming attack, to sally out and take possession of the forts."

He then showed them that thirty were about as many as could move about in the Redan and the Roman camp. He also said it would be necessary to get the two small cannon ready placed and loaded.

"If the attack comes at all," he said, "we shall have it in a day or two. If Reonardo and his gang had not shown so much pertinacity, I might have hoped that they would retreat after their last experience on the 'Orsini.' But I cannot entertain that hope now."

One portion of his plans related to the placing of

the cannon in position that very night. It could be done after all but themselves were in bed.

"And I would suggest," said Morse, "that we place the small-arms for sixty and the ammunition there also."

"Suppose the Spaniards should find them there?" suggested Felton.

"Suppose they find the cannon," said Morse; "we must risk it. If I understand your plans right, Jim, we are not to take possession of the forts until the last moment, as it were?"

"Practically that is what it amounts to," said Jim.

"A watch will be kept as usual."

"Must be. Now let us make out a list of those who are to assist us, and let them know what is expected of them. They are to understand that outside themselves it is not to be mentioned. Should our arrangements reach the ears of Napoleon—save his name!—he would certainly spoil it."

"Will you want any of them to-night?" inquired Rainstone.

"All that has to be done to-night," said Jim, "can be done by ourselves. All you need tell them is to be ready."

They soon made out a list of the boys who would most likely be ready for service, and each undertook to speak to a certain number. That done, they had nothing more to do until they met in the hall at midnight.

The meeting broke up, and the niggers, who were cooling their heels in the passage, called back to their sanctum.

Macbeth, on entering the kitchen, cast a suspicious glance round as if he feared to find some evidence of malpractices common to youth; but there was nothing. All things were in order as he left them. The boys went away, and the trio were left alone.

"Spect dey gettin' up a s'prise for old Nap," said Macbeth.

"Mose likely," said Hamlet.

"What sort ob s'prise hab you got into you cradderums?" demanded Romeo.

"Bread-and-butter his bed, squirt water ober him," said Macbeth; "anyting to annoy de duffer."

"You 'got a good ijea ob tings, you hab," said Romeo, scornfully.

"P'raps you got a berrer one," said his father, with dilated nostrils.

"I hab 'bout dat," was the easy reply.

"What am it?"

"Dat my business, and me wonder at you axing for inflammation from such a young fool as me."

He was on vantage ground there, and they allowed him to keep it. Romeo kept his idea to himself, and it may be said that he was on the right track, if he had not arrived at the absolute truth.

At an early hour the boys retired, and by ten o'clock there was silence in the castle. As a matter of form Jim sought Mr. Farrell at the last moment and suggested that a watch should be kept. But that inflated personage declined to receive a suggestion from Gordon, against whom he had revived his original animosity.

"The suggestion is absurd," he said. "What person without artillery could hope to break in here?"

Jim was satisfied, and did not argue the matter further. He had the castle to himself and friends for the night.

At the appointed time they were by the outer gate Morse with a lantern to give light there. Outside, he did not propose to use it. In that elevated spot, free from the shadow of the trees, the full benefit of the light of the stars could be obtained.

To guard against surprise, Jim took up a position on the pathway, because he, of all there, was the least likely to give way to unnecessary alarm.

Morse saw to the placing of the two guns, Betsy and Bella, in two small embrasures, and pointed so that both their muzzles commanded the path to the castle.

The small-arms, with a good supply of ammunition which had been prepared during Jim's journey to the "Orsini," were laid close under the walls of the fort, and covered up with some old sacking to keep off the damp. That done, Morse said the others were to go to bed, for he had something else to do.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Dawson, "what is it?"

"What I can best do alone," replied Morse, in his quiet way. "To have assistance would hinder me."

They all went in but Jim, who thought he understood the reason for Morse's desire to be alone.

"You are going to do some dangerous work," he said, "and object to our sharing in it?"

"When by myself," said Morse, "I have nerves of steel, I see no fear—feel none. But if any of you fellows are near me, I get into a blue funk, and then an accident is likely to happen."

"But surely I can stay?"

"You make me worse than all the rest put together, Jim, because you are more to me."

There was no standing up against this line of argument, so Jim entered the castle, and finding the others, pretty well worn out, had retired, quietly awaited the coming of Morse. A full half-hour elapsed ere he appeared.

"It is done," he said. "I have made a special mine of my own near the Redan, and another immediately in front of the Roman Camp. If we are not attacked in the morning, I shall spring them by way of experiment. Meanwhile, nobody must go outside here unless I am with him, for fear of accidents."

"We ought to be among the first stirring, then," said Jim.

"I have pinned a paper to the gate, on which I have written in pencil, 'Do not go outside. It is dangerous.'"

As there was nothing more to be done that night, Jim suggested getting a little sleep; but ere they went to bed, Morse went into the laboratory for a few minutes. When he came back, he said, serenely:

"Jim, if necessary, I could blow up the castle and all in it to atoms. It might be better than some things—as a last resource, I mean."

"Most certainly let it be as a last resource," said Jim, more hurriedly than was his wont.

Morse smiled faintly. But he knew that Jim was not a coward, and he was not surprised. Together they went upstairs, and then the castle was still until the dawn.

Morse, true to his promise, was down early before anyone, as he believed, was stirring. But on entering the big hall he discovered Mr. Farrell trying the door of the laboratory with a key.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but that is a room I have recently devoted to study."

"Well, what of that?" demanded the schoolmaster, with considerable asperity. He had been having a bad night, and his liver was out of order.

"Nothing," coolly replied Morse, "save that if you handle some of the things inside there with a rough hand, you will blow the castle and all in it half-way to the stars."

"Morse, you have no right to have such things here."

"I had them here, sir, before it became necessary to occupy the castle, and I have need of them. So long as only myself intrudes there, nothing will happen."

"And we are to be kept in a state of constant apprehension, are we?" angrily demanded Mr. Farrell.

"You need not be afraid, sir," said Morse. "So long as the compounds are handled properly, an explosion is impossible."

This was so far comforting, but the schoolmaster did not exhibit in his face that he was satisfied. As Morse walked away to the gate, he followed, having prudently determined not to inspect the laboratory for a while. He came up close behind Morse, and read the notice fixed upon the gate. He smiled sarcastically.

"You do your best to scare us in every way," he said.

"That is no scare, but the solemn truth," said Morse. "Outside I have prepared two mines, either of which will explode when an almost invisible peg is trodden on."

"I should like to see those mines," said Mr. Farrell, sarcastically.

"Another time," said Morse, as he began the ascent of the stairs leading to the ramparts.

Again Mr. Farrell followed him, and as the boy surveyed the country round and the sea beyond, he took up a position by his side.

At first they could see no signs of life, but eventually Morse saw in the distance towards Silver Bay a number of mere spots moving on the sands. Judging by the height and the distance he viewed them from, he came to the conclusion they were human beings—Reonardo's followers, in fact.

They were moving to and fro with no apparent object at first, but in a little while got together and advanced in the direction of the ruins of the school.

Morse promptly divined that the long-expected attack was about to take place, and without saying a word to the astounded schoolmaster, who had seen nothing, he sped away below, and hastened to where Jim was still sleeping in one of the old stone chambers that had been turned into dormitories.

In five minutes all who were to act in the forts had been aroused with as little commotion as possible.

Some of those not concerned were at the same time awakened, and wanted to know what was the matter; but they were bidden to go to sleep again, as the party was merely going out for morning drill.

"Get hold of what you can to eat and drink," was Morse's advice, "and make a rough breakfast outside."

"And keep your peckers up," said Jim.

They wanted encouragement, naturally, for how many boys would have been awakened from sleep under similar circumstances and not felt a tremor of alarm? But as a body they bore themselves bravely, and may be registered as fair samples of British pluck.

They spoke in whispers as they assembled in the hall, while some of their number visited the larder and store-rooms to get a supply of provisions. They brought it back, and Romeo into the bargain.

"Whateber am up, Massa Gordon," said the negro, "me and Charley ought to be in it. Me not been 'sleep much to-night, for de purpose of habin' a finger in de pie."

This appeal could not be resisted, and Romeo was despatched to release Charley, who had been shut up on the previous day in one of the back offices.

When that sagacious beast appeared he demonstrated his delight by performing half a dozen of his special tricks unsolicited. He stood at attention, shouldered arms with a stick he took from a corner of the hall, strutted to and fro like a sentry, challenged a supposed passer-by, and threatened to shoot him if he did not halt, and so on, to the manifest delight of his friends.

"In a scramble," said Jim, "Charley will be a host in himself."

"Time presses," warned Morse.

They hurried out, and discovered that the perverse Mr. Farrell had opened the gates, and was standing on the bridge, airing himself in the morning sunlight.

"Boys!" he thundered, "I will not——"

Then he caught sight of Charley, and bolted forward.

"For Heaven's sake, sir," cried Morse, "mind where you go!"

The terrified schoolmaster was between the devil and the deep sea, as it were, and the expression of unmitigated terror on his face taxed the risible muscles of the boys, little as they were in the humour for laughter.

"Stand a little way off to the right," said Morse. "Not too far. Now keep still, and do not budge an inch until we are past you. Jim, keep your fellows close to the moat"—this in a whisper—"the mines are well out of the way. Only I think that Nap will be the better for another scare."

"Boys," said Mr. Farrell, attempting to appear dignified, "I insist upon your returning to the castle."

They did not heed him, but, dividing into two parties, as previously arranged, entered the forts.

Jim, by his special desire, took command of the Redan, as the first likely to be attacked, and Romeo and Charley accompanied him.

Morse and his followers entered the Roman Camp, and were soon busy getting out and loading their rifles. The ammunition was divided equally, and the small gun Bella was loaded and run out.

Mr. Farrell, when he saw the rifles, shivered, and there came over him the sensation of its being a dream. But that was speedily dispelled by the calm voice of Morse, advising him to retire and close the castle-gates.

"But what does all this mean?" demanded the schoolmaster, wildly.

"The Spaniards are coming, and we are going to fight them here," replied Jim.

"You—you—a parcel of boys!"

At this moment Martin appeared at the gateway, and stared about him in surprise. Morse hurriedly explained the state of matters to him.

"You will be wanted inside," sang out Jim, "in case anything happens to us!"

"But you can't be sacrificed," urged Martin.

"Close the gates, and don't open them until some of us ask for admittance. We think we are strong enough to fight the ruffians."

"I insist on *all* being inside!" said Mr. Farrell, clutching his hair. "I am master here."

"Shut the gates," said Morse, "and leave him outside with us."

"Stop a moment!" sang out the schoolmaster, with ludicrous haste; "I am coming."

Then he vanished under the portal, and Martin, seeing there was no course but to obey orders, closed the gates.

"I can hear them coming," said Jim, just loud enough for all to hear; "talking as such fellows do at times of excitement. They can't help it."

"It keeps their courage up," said Rainstone, who was standing beside him.

"Form yourselves in a line," said Jim, "and keep your heads below the top of the fort until you get a word from me. Then up you come, and let fly into them. Take time. Be cool and steady, and don't waste a shot."

He looked down the line of young faces, and saw that, though a bit white, they were all resolute.

"A victory gained with the loss of one of us," thought Jim, "will be dear. But can such a loss be avoided?"

This was a terrible question in his mind, but he had to put it aside, for Reonardo and his men were coming, talking as they came, not loudly, but earnestly. And it might have been to keep their courage up, for they were in their hearts in dread of the boys.

Only by threats and promises of reward had the Spanish leader been able to induce them to make this attack. If it failed, it was to be the last. It partook of the nature of a desperate assault upon a strongly-entrenched foe.

CHAPTER CVII.

THE FIGHT.—A GALLANT BAND.—FLIGHT AND DISASTER.



BY this time it was known to all in the castle that the supreme hour of their peril was at hand. In hot haste the boys left behind tumbled out of their beds and hastened below. There they were met by Martin, who, with the other men, endeavoured to keep them calm. But what could they do? The boys would talk, anyway, and some of them were such little fellows, that the prospect of a real fight and a desperate one set their blood tingling in their veins.

And Napoleon Farrell—what did he do, but rush up to warn Mrs. Farrell that practically their last hour had come.

Then Eveline must hear of it, and both mother and daughter soon joined the excited group below.

And now all the masters showed how little they were to be depended upon. Mr. Storeby and Turner lost their heads, and went rambling about in a semi-idiotic way that exasperated Martin and the other master-teachers of trades, and they finally bundled them into the room Charley had recently occupied at the back of the kitchen, and fastened them in.

Who could think of breakfast at that time of excitement and terror?

Eveline had only to run her eyes over the boys in the hall when she came down, to see that those with whom she was most concerned were missing. Outside doing their duty, and more than their duty, of course.

Somebody suggested going to the ramparts—it might have been Eveline—but in the confusion of voices no certainty could be made on that point, especially as the cry was promptly taken up by a score voices, and there was a rush for that place of vantage for seeing the coming fight.

But Eveline, swift and light of foot, was the first there, and the scene she looked upon below amazed her.

Behind the parapets of the forts crouched the boys *eating their breakfast*. In the Redan Charley was stretched out before them with his mouth open, to catch any morsels he might be favoured with.

Romeo was standing behind Jim, who was seated on the parapet with his rifle resting on his knees. In his hand he had a biscuit, which he was eating, while his eyes kept close watch on the path below.

It was a peaceful scene so far, but the hum of the Spaniards' voices told another story, and for a moment the fair girl buried her face in her hands. Then as the boys poured up from below she rallied, and assumed a calmness that was very opposite of the turmoil in her breast.

"Where are the men?" she asked Dibble, who was one of the first to arrive.

"Down by the gate," replied the boy. "Martin says that, if necessary, he will go out and give a hand. They have their rifles."

"Why do they not go now?" impetuously demanded Eveline.

"It was Jim Gordon's orders that they were to stop here and look after the castle."

"Wise, I daresay," muttered Eveline, "but I wish he would think less of some particular person in it at such a time as this."

She saw Jim drop suddenly down from the parapet, and his voice, although he spoke low, floated up to her:

"All ready. Cool and steady. Fire at the word—not before!"

Then glancing lower down, she saw the Spaniards coming up the path, Reonardo foremost.

Jim kept his head low, peering over the top of the gun which was ready in the embrasure.

The advancing foe made quite a crowd in the narrow way, and there was no indication that they expected any defence outside the castle, for Reonardo, glancing upward and seeing a host of heads above the ramparts, drew the attention of his men to them.

Rifles and pistols were instantly levelled at them, and the group of heads disappeared with wondrous celerity. Reonardo uttered a hoarse laugh.

"Are those your brave young Britishers?" he asked, scornfully. "Advance, comrades! The castle is ours!"

They poured up in a stream until they were almost level with the first fort, and then the two guns belched out their fiery contents.

Cries and groans followed, but were drowned in the ringing reports of the rifles as Jim gave the word to fire. The small-arms in Morse's fort for the present were silent.

Smoke obscured everything for the few moments that succeeded, but, in spite of the obvious danger, those on the ramparts raised their heads again and looked down upon the scene. And this, as the smoke cleared away, is what they saw.

Reonardo and some of the more desperate of the men—half their number—had overcome their momentary surprise and made a dash for the fort. Of the rest, fully two-thirds lay wounded or dead, and the remaining portion had fled.

And now the rifles from the Roman Camp began to speak: Morse, cool and steady enough to satisfy the most particular of field-m Marshals, was commanding his troop, directing them to aim so that by no chance would they wound their friends in the opposite fort.

Several Spaniards fell under their fire.

But it was on Jim and his party of young warriors that the chief attention was concentrated.

Reonardo, raging like a furious tiger, leapt into the fort with a pistol in one hand and a dagger in the other. He was followed by half a dozen or so of his men.

The fight that ensued was most desperate—a chaos of heads and arms, daggers and clubbed rifles.

The madness of war, that often comes to young warriors in their first experience of a battle, came over the boys.

They fought as surely boys never fought before during the brief spell the contest lasted.

Never afterwards could even those who looked down from above give the details of that fight. They noticed, however, that Charley, the bear, seized a man and held him tight between his huge forearms until all was over.

Then, as the smoke died away and the hubbub ceased, it was seen that two of the boys were stretched on the ground and seven Spaniards tumbled in a heap. An eighth was still in the grasp of Charley, who finally dropped him and quietly assumed a recumbent position.

A ninth man had entered the fort, and he turned tail and bolted. As he rushed down the path his foot trod upon the spring of the mine, which, strange to say, had not been touched by the main body as they rushed up.

Immediately a fountain of fire and smoke shot into the air, accompanied by a report that deafened everybody for a few moments.

The man himself was thrown high in the air, and he was seen to turn over and over, and finally shoot down like a rocket-stick among the trees below.

A moment after Morse quietly leaped over the edge of the Roman Camp and calmly drew a peg from the ground.

"It won't be wanted to-day," he muttered, and lifting a cut turf from the ground, took out a small tin canister, which he carefully placed in his pocket.

CHAPTER CVIII.

AFTER THE BATTLE WAS OVER.



THE fight was over and the victory won. Reonardo lay lifeless in the fort. His men were dead or dying, or flying they knew not whither for their lives.

Breathlessly Jim Gordon leant against the fort embrasure, gazing on the terrible scene. To him came Morse to comfort and rally him. The boys from the ramparts were struggling to get down first to the ground below and give the heroes of that brief but awful fight for youngsters to participate in, a cheer.

They left behind them a girl lying senseless upon the ground. Overcome by her emotions, Eveline had fainted.

Obedying a shout from Morse, Martin had opened the gate, and there was a great pouring out of eager men and boys. The scene was one that would be indelibly imprinted on their memories while life lasted. First thoughts were given to the two boys who had fallen. They were wounded with knives, and their

names were Rainstone and Felton. Both were stabbed in the breast.

Jim had rallied by this time, and he took the former in his arms, while Morse supported the latter. Martin quickly removed their upper clothing and examined their wounds.

"Dangerous perhaps," he said, "but not necessarily fatal. Get two beds ready in a room, and I will bring them along. I am experienced in carrying the wounded."

Rainstone opened his eyes and said, feebly:

"I'm all right. How's the kick-up gone?"

"We've beaten them easily," replied Jim.

"I'm glad of that," rejoined Rainstone, and closed his eyes again.

Felton remained unconscious, and was eventually borne away to the bed prepared for him in that condition. Eveline recovered, and had come down from the ramparts by that time, and quietly offered to assist Jim and Martin in making the wounded youngsters comfortable.

Morse remained in the fort to see if he could help the Spaniards, but those who still breathed appeared to be past all human aid. Most of them had received bullet-wounds, and one was stunned with a crushing blow from the butt-end of a rifle. All quickly passed away.

Then there were the dead to see to, and they lay about to the number of fifteen, besides their chief. Half of them met their fate from the two small cannon, and several were fairly riddled with missiles.

Mr. Farrell was in hiding somewhere, and Mrs. Farrell was engaged in giving help to the wounded boys in the castle. Morse had the entire outside work to superintend.

"We shall never need the Redan any more," he said, "we will turn it into a graveyard for the dead."

They laid the fallen men reverently in a row, and left them while they went into the castle and rested and refreshed themselves. All had need of some warm coffee or a stimulating drink, which Macbeth and Hamlet, still in a shaky condition, were preparing.

It was scarcely necessary to close the gates again, but Morse thought it ought to be done. As the boys stood in the hall drinking their coffee, talking over the dramatic events of the morning, a clamouring was heard at the gate.

Morse went to see who it was, and challenged before opening.

"Who is there?" he asked.

"It is I—a woman—Lucia di Valo," was the reply.

"What do you want?"

"My Reonardo."

"If I open the gate to answer you, will you be peaceable?"

"I will. I swear it."

Morse opened the gate, and there stood Lucia, wild-eyed and despairing. She extended her arms, and cried out:

"My Reonardo! Where is he?"

"How can I tell who is Reonardo?" answered Morse, evasively. "Some of the men fled away."

"He was not of their number," replied Lucia, with a bitter cry. "I stayed at the base of the path and watched. He did not come."

"Do not forget," said Morse, "that he and his men were the assailants."

"I forget nothing," she said. "To you I say nothing—no. To-day there is peace between us. I swear it. Only let me see my Reonardo."

"You may find him there," said Morse, pointing to the Redan.

He saw her run towards the fort, and leap over the breastwork with the agility of a deer pursued by the hounds.

A moment more and she had disappeared, to throw herself upon the body of her lover.

What a piercing shriek it was that burst from her lips when she knew that he was dead! It rang out far and wide. It sent a quiver through the breast of the listener.

He was moved by the grief of the woman, although it was to her race they owed so much trouble and misery. Creeping up, he peered over the side of the fort, and saw her lying prone upon the ground, her head on the breast of her lost lover.

"Wake, Reonardo—awake!" she moaned. "If only for one moment, let me look upon your eyes again."

But there was no response. There could have been none if her voice had been as a hundred trumpets. Suddenly she was upon her feet again with her extended arms raised a little above her head. Her fingers worked nervously.

"My love, I will avenge you! *Alone I will do it!*"

Then, without any apparent heed of the presence of Morse, she sprang upon the top of the earthwork, threw up her arms again, and leaping down, vanished as a bird on the wing, from sight.

"All danger is not past," thought Morse. "I do not like the looks of her. But her anger may come to naught, and I will not speak of her coming. This should be a day of quiet rejoicing for us all."

He had not forgotten the two wounded boys, but he took a hopeful view of their case, as Martin did. Whatever befell them they had without doubt done their duty like young heroes.

Returning to the castle, he found Jim just down from the room where Rainstone and Felton had been

placed, and he was glad to get a favourable report from him.

"Both conscious and very quiet. Almost free from pain."

The wounds were, it seemed, the result of downward stabs, and therefore not so deep as would have been the case if a direct horizontal blow had been delivered.

"Martin is as good as a surgeon," said Jim. "How true it is that we do not know what is in a fellow until the pinch comes!"

The rest of the morning was occupied in making the graves and interring the slain. Even the man who had been hoisted in the air by Morse's mine was not forgotten. They hunted him up in the lower wood, and buried him near the spot where he had fallen.

Jim took no share in this work. Morse superintended it throughout. The "hero of the Redan," as his chums dubbed him, kept a lookout from the tower Morse had opened, and towards noon he saw a felucca sailing away in the direction of Minorca.

Having a field-glass with him he was able to make out Lucia di Valo and five men, all who remained of the band who had come to destroy the school and its occupants.

One portion of their mission they had successfully accomplished. In the other they had failed.

"Gone!" murmured Jim. "Will they ever return? Shall we hear any more of them?"

He could not tell, but if he had been able to dip into the almost immediate future, he would have known that their troubles were to take a new form which neither he nor any person in the castle dreamt of.

By the afternoon all signs of the recent combat had been cleared away, and all that remained as a record of it outside the castle were the graves within the fort over which Sleeney, the carpenter, with some of his young assistants were busy fixing wooden crosses.

On each and all of the men they found something—a tobacco-box, a purse, a handkerchief, or something—that gave a clue to their names as far as initials could do so, and these were cut upon the crosses so that in the future if any of their friends paid a visit to the spot they might know where they were laid.

"They were our foes," said Sleeney, "and bitter ones. But lying here wipes out all ill-feeling. May they be forgiven their sins as I hope to be forgiven mine!"

To which those who were standing around murmured a soft "Amen."

With a day so auspiciously ended, and good news as to the condition of Rainstone and Felton, it is no marvel that the boys were merry in the hall.

Mrs. Farrell and Eveline were there looking on, and Jim sat by them chatting and watching the

antics of Charley, the bear, who was permitted to share in the revels. Hamlet, Macbeth, and Romeo were also permitted to join in the general mirth.

Shamefaced in a corner, unheeded by all, the two undermasters stood sniggeringly looking on, Mr. Storeby varying the expression of his face by occasionally glancing in the direction of Jim and Eveline.

They knew that they had acted a cowardly part, and, what was worse, were aware that the knowledge was common property. Henceforth how could they hope to be respected by the boys?

The evening was getting late, when another summons was heard at the gate. This time it was a man shouting, and for a while it passed unheeded.

But one of the boys, who had strolled into the courtyard "for a cooler" after a rough-and-tumble game of blindman's-buff, heard it and reported the matter to Jim.

"It sounds like Old Chorker with a cold," said the boy.

"And I daresay it is Chorker," said Jim, with a smile. "Let him in."

They had no fears of further attack, and Chorker indeed it was, woebegone and worn out, hungry and forlorn, and also scared, if his looks went for anything.

As he stood in the doorway of the hall he attracted the attention of all, and the noise of revelry ceased.

"Looks like the ancient mariner," said Terry.

"I suppose," said Chorker, in a hollow voice, "that you won't mind giving me a bit of wittles, seeing as I've nigh been made a meal on?"

"First tell me who wants to make a meal of you," said Jim, "and then go with Romeo and have what you want to eat."

"Comin' up to the castle jes' now," said Chorker, glancing apprehensively behind him, "about the most curious-looking party I ever see pops out and cries, 'Here, you stop; I'm hungry. I'd like a bit of you toasted.'"

"That will do," said Jim; "we do not want any more of that story."

"You don't believe me?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, it's true, anyway," said Chorker, "and the party was dressed in leaves. But I didn't stop to look at him closely, for I come along in a hurry, and all the way up here I hears him a-hollerin', 'Stop, will you? I'm hungry.'"

Muttering to himself, Chorker followed Romeo out of the room. Morse went up to Jim and spoke of the wild man who had bitten Dibble in the arm.

"There is more truth than you think in Chorker's story," he said. "Whoever this extraordinary person may be, he certainly exists."

"Well," said Jim, "it appears that for once in a way Chorker has told the truth. By the way, where is Nap? I haven't set eyes on him since the morning."

"No more have I," admitted Morse; "indeed, I have not thought of him."

And it turned out, on making quiet inquiry, that nobody had seen the redoubtable Napoleon since the fighting began.

At the first sound of firing he had vanished.

Mrs. Farrell did not seem to be concerned about him, and on that account Jim was of opinion that nobody else need bother about the schoolmaster. Nor did they.

After an evening of rejoicing, prolonged until near midnight, they retired to rest, after Martin had seen that all was secure.

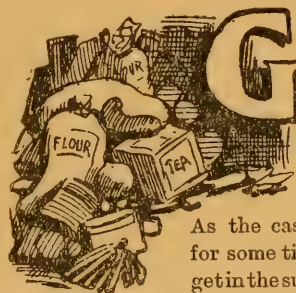
With the gates securely barred and the portcullis down, no man by ordinary means could obtain admission. For additional security the inner doors of the great hall were also secured, and, satisfied that they might rest in peace, no sentry was posted.

The wounded boys were in a room next to Mrs. Farrell's, and she volunteered to look in upon them during the night. But they were doing well, and were sleeping peacefully when Jim looked in for the last time that night.

Still nothing had been seen or heard of Mr. Farrell, and wondering at his continued non-appearance, Jim fell asleep.

CHAPTER CIX.

GETTING THE CARGO HOME.—SOMETHING LOST.



GOOD news of the patients in the morning set Jim's mind at rest, and his next thoughts were of the cargo of the "Orsini," hidden in the cave.

As the castle must be their home for some time, it would be as well to get in the supplies without any delay.

As a matter of form, he proposed to consult Mr. Farrell, but on making inquiries concerning him, he received the same reply as had been given him the night before. Nothing had been heard or seen of that gentleman.

As a last resource he spoke to Mrs. Farrell, who was as ignorant of the whereabouts of her husband as the rest of people. "I daresay he has run away again," she said, indifferently, "but we shall soon see him once more, when he feels it will be safe for him to return."

Nothing could be done then but to leave the mystery of the missing schoolmaster for the time, and attend to the transference of the cargo.

Accordingly Jim mustered all the boys and pressed them into the service, leaving only the three negroes and Martin and the men to look after the castle. Now that they had no need of ammunition for human foes, Morse appointed a body-guard with guns to attend them, and shoot anything eatable they came across on the way.

There was a fair supply of wild game, although hitherto Mr. Farrell had never attempted to utilise it.

They were not going to stay all night, as they had done before. Jim's plan was to get out the cargo, transfer it a certain distance, and then come home for the night. As they had no known enemies on the island, they did not fear being robbed.

There was that peculiar wild man, it was true, but Jim could hardly believe in his existence. He thought that he would turn out to a specimen of one of the larger apes. Monkeys, he had already discovered, abounded on the other side of the island.

The whole party arrived at the shore without mishap, and Jim superintended the clearing of the cave.

He had already informed those who had assisted him before that it was his intention to leave the portion of the cargo marked "G. T. H." behind in the cave. The possibility of an owner turning up was still in existence, and even if he did not, Jim preferred having his property well out of the reach of Mr. Farrell.

Two hundred boys, when they set to work, can do a great deal in a few hours, and by the time named the whole of the cargo for the castle had been got out of the cave. They had brought a day's rations with them, and partook of a midday meal with mirth for dessert.

After all their recent misfortunes the freedom of the time was enjoyed as a man long captive appreciates liberty.

Their next task was to transfer the lot half a mile on the road and by the time that was done the boys had had enough of it, and Jim gave the word for home.

They left behind them quite a pyramid of good things, with sacks of flour for a base, and tins of tea and coffee for the apex.

There was also in addition to food a store of all sorts of necessities, such as knives, forks, needles, candles, and a hundred other things too numerous to specify.

It was quite a considerable object on the level ground, and on the road home they were able for a long distance, if they glanced back, to see it.

There was no news at the castle save that which was good. The wounded boys were progressing

favourably, and in a few days would be able to leave their beds.

An early retirement to rest was arranged by Jim, with a view to an early start in the morning.

He proposed getting all the stores up to the castle by the evening. So the youngsters were aroused in the morning while the shadows of night yet lingered in the sky, a hasty breakfast partaken of, and each with his rations in a small linen bag, they set forth.

Nothing had been heard of the missing schoolmaster, but as those dearest to him did not trouble, the boys felt they could endure the lengthened absence of the schoolmaster with fortitude.

A quick march brought them to where they ought to be able to sight the pyramid. But it was not in sight.

The amazement, to say the least, with which they were all smitten for a moment held them dumb.

Apparently from the distance, about half a mile, it had completely vanished. But the keener eyes of some of the boys soon detected the fact that the pyramid had simply been overthrown and strewn about.

They lost no time in getting to the spot, and there this condition of things was made painfully apparent.

Still nothing was destroyed, although it was soon evident that many things were missing. Three of the sacks of flour, according to a list Jim had made, were gone. There was also a quantity of grocery, tins of meat, and so on, missing.

"Somebody has been here and helped himself," said Jim, "and pulled down the pyramid to get at what he wanted."

"It must be Old Chorker," said Terry. "It is just the thing he would do to spite us, if for nothing more."

"I think I have it," said Brodie. "After his experience of semi-starvation he would naturally look after himself. I can understand his being doubtful of the reception he would meet with at the castle, so before coming along he just helped himself, and hid away the plunder in case we gave him the throw-out."

"And finally," added Jim, "he came along with a bogus story of a wild man. When we get back the old skunk shall be made to disgorge his ill-gotten gains."

Morse shook his head.

"Chorker," he said, "may have helped himself from this pile, but there is a wild man or somebody shamming the character."

As all the talking in the world would not help them to a solution of the mystery of the plunderer, they went to work, and by stages the stores were taken on to the castle.

Twilight had come when they were still engaged in

pulling the packages into the courtyard, preliminary to putting them in a proper storing-place on the morrow.

Again there was no news of disturbance, and again the information that nothing had been seen or heard of Mr. Farrell.

"Something must have happened to him," said Jim, "and although he has behaved all round very badly, I hope it is nothing serious."

Questions addressed to the two undermasters elicited nothing. Mrs. Farrell held to her opinion that her husband had merely retreated to some place where he had hidden himself in mortal fear, or was "sulking."

"It is possible, Gordon," she said, as they talked it over in the seclusion of her room, "that he has conceived the idea of creating anxiety in my breast. He said that I should drive him to do something I should be sorry for. But I am not afraid of that. People who are always threatening to kill themselves or run away never do it."

"It is odd, anyway," remarked Jim. "There are some portions of the castle we have not explored. I will have a look about to-morrow."

Eveline came in at this minute, and Jim asked her what she thought of her father's disappearance.

"Well, really," she said, after a moment's thought, "he has done so many extraordinary things that I do not know what to think."

"Are you anxious about him?"

"Naturally. After all, he is my father."

"Nobody can have eaten him," remarked Mrs. Farrell, composedly, "and after the things he has done, and the perils he has escaped from, I do not think we need worry about him. Evy, dear, will you sing? Perhaps Gordon is fond of music."

Jim declared that he was very fond of it. Eveline played the mandoline and sang to it, but hitherto he had only heard snatches of her melodies, and at a distance. Since the school troubles began she had not touched the instrument.

"I have almost forgotten how to play," she said, demurely.

"Gordon will not be too critical, dear," said Mrs. Farrell.

"I am sure I shall be delighted," Jim assured her, with a glance at Eveline.

So Eveline, having no alternative, got out the mandoline and sang to him with a sweetness that would have disarmed all criticism if he had thought of indulging in it, and a very pleasant hour passed away.

As it was nine o'clock and supper-time, Jim presently retired, and on the way down looked in on Rainstone and Felton. He found them sitting up in their beds, looking very pale, but bright and cheery.

"Getting along, dear boys?" he said.

"Famously," replied Rainstone. "We want to get

up to-morrow, but Martin says we must stop in bed for another day or two."

"He fears your wounds will reopen?"

"That's just it, and as they have not festered this time, he says it would be madness to give them a chance. A festering wound in the breast, he tells us, is sure to be troublesome, if not dangerous."

Jim stayed a few minutes more, and then left them. As he descended the stairs leading to the great hall, he heard a distant sound as of somebody beating a mat, or thumping on a door.

Looking over the balustrade—a fine piece of stonework—he saw Terry coming along with his hands in his pockets.

"What's all that row about?" he asked.

"Chorker," was the calm reply. "He has been shut up all day without grub. They forgot him, and I have just taken him his supper. It was like entering the den of a wild beast, and I had to threaten to shoot him if he didn't stand back from the door while I put his tommy on the stone floor. We have given him two chairs and a mattress to sleep on. Romeo and Changeling brought them in."

"But why keep him a prisoner?" asked Jim, in surprise.

"He won't tell us what he has done with the stolen grub," answered Terry. "Swears he hasn't set eyes on it. Foams when it is mentioned, and he has the straight tip that he won't be let out until he tells the truth."

"Perhaps he wishes to tell it now."

"No; he is only amusing himself with making that row, and venting a strong desire to perform anatomical deeds upon all our livers."

"A night there won't hurt him. I will see him in the morning," said Jim.

So Chorker was left, and presently he ceased to hammer at the door. Jim's last words to the boys that night were:

"Remember the first thing that has to be done is to put away our stores, and give the occupied part of the castle a thorough cleaning. Cleanliness is next to godliness. It is necessary for health's sake. As we are short-handed all must help, and you will take your orders from Mrs. Farrell. Don't be afraid of doing woman's work for a time. No form of labour, when it is necessary, disgraces man or boy."

They assented to this with a general and cheerful good-night.

CHAPTER CX.

THE NEW LIFE IN THE CASTLE.—THE WILD MAN AGAIN.



IN the morning Jim's first thought was of Chorker, and he resolved to visit him in his prison before breakfast. It was not that he was concerned so much for the old fraud as that he was anxious to make

certain about the theft of the portion of the stores as to whom it might be charged to.

He believed, from his long experience of Chorker and his ways, that he could make sure whether he was telling the truth or not.

Having dressed himself before half the other boys had well begun, he slipped down to the kitchen, where he found Romeo busy lighting the fire.

He asked him if he had the key of Chorker's prison, and Romeo said there was no key. The handle of the door had been secured by a piece of wire having been twisted round it and about a nail in the wall.

"If you go in to see de cuss," said Romeo, "berrer take me wif you. A ragin' lion am a dyin' lamb to him."

"I am not afraid of Chorker," said Jim; "but if you hear any rumpus you may come along."

Jim had no fear of him, and having untwisted the wire, he opened the door and entered.

Chorker, who was lying on a crudely-made bed, consisting of a mattress and two chairs, endeavoured to rise, and the whole thing collapsed, throwing him down sprawling on the floor.

"Nice, ain't it?" he growled, looking up at Jim; "that's what's happened to me whenever I turned over in the night, and jedging by the number of times I've come orf, I should say I turned ivery ten minutes. This is a nice place to keep a man in, ain't it?"

"It is *not* a nice place," returned Jim.

Nor was it. It was a bare, back-scellery-looking place, lighted only by a small window near the ceiling. It was barely a foot square, and three-fourths of the dismal dungeon-hole was wrapt in gloom. With the exception of Chorker's crude bed, there was neither furniture nor fittings to be seen.

"You have only to tell the truth, Chorker," said Jim, "and you need not stay here an hour."

"You ain't got no legal right to keep me here."

"I fear that legal matters are a little mixed on this island."

Chorker got up slowly, savagely cleared one of the chairs, and asked if he might take the liberty of sitting

down. The question was put in a sarcastic spirit—the very acme of a soul's bitterness.

"I wouldn't ax for the priwelege," he added, "if I warn't sore all over with one thing and another."

Jim made no reply, and he sat down with a dogged look on his face, casting a wistful glance at the door. But Jim barred the way, and he did not appear disposed to try a rush past him. Probably because he feared he would be promptly brought back again.

"Now for the truth, Chorker," said Jim.

"I've told it," answered Chorker, earnestly. "I swears it. I don't know no more about the missin' wittles than a babe unborn. All the blessed day I was a-proddin' and diggin' about for them there things as I had hid in fun."

"And you did not find them?" inquired Jim, innocently.

"No, bust 'em!" was the savage reply. "And do you think that if I'd stolen them there things I should have come back to the castle like a ravening wolf, as I was?"

"Something in that," thought Jim. Aloud he said:

"I will give you the benefit of the doubt. You will be at liberty to resume your ordinary life with us. But you will please make yourself agreeable, and give a hand with the necessary work."

"Mr. Gordon," said Chorker, springing up, "I knowed I should get justice from you, if I can't from anybdy else. You've only got to say what you want done, and I'm the man to do it."

He was only too glad to escape from his place of confinement, and for several hours afterwards he was almost amiable in his bearing. At the breakfast-table he actually passed the bread to Changeling without being asked.

As a rule he wanted asking, and then did not always respond politely.

"This is a forerunning to a airthquake," said Changeling, and Chorker positively smiled as an addendum to the general mirth at the table provoked by Changeling's remark.

Terry grumbled over the release of Chorker, because he had arranged with two or three others to have a good time at the old man's expense. But it was no use demurring when Jim commanded, and he made amends as far as he could for his loss by securing Chorker in a gang of workers under him, and worried the old sinner pretty well out of his wits.

He was also gratified by the sudden change in Chorker's temperament, which led him to make some offensive remarks to Changeling, who forthwith punched his head, and the pair had a turn at fisticuffs in the courtyard, to the great delight of a crowd of boys.

It was short, but very sweet to the spectators, for Chorker had no chance from the first. He simply

stood up to receive punishment, and when he thought he had had enough he lay down.

"I'm done," he said, "but there was a time when I'd ha' doubled two like you up in arf the time you've taken to lick me."

"All right," said Changeling; "only you keep a civil tongue in your head, or the next time *I'll take it clean orf for you!*"

With this and other by-play to sweeten their labours the boys worked on until noon. Then suddenly a startling interruption took place.

The gate was open, as there was nothing to fear in the belief of all, and the courtyard was almost empty. Only Dibble, Pesketh, and Trimmer were there, indulging in an improvised game of hopscotch as a relief to their toil.

Jim and Morse were away on the rampart, and had been there all the morning. All the rest of the school, including the men, were busy at their appointed work inside the castle. The trio named were in a sense truants, having stolen out to shirk a bit.

The beauty of the day was worthy of the splendid clime, cloudless, with a cool breeze blowing. Through the open gateway they could see the horizon of the sea.

Pesketh, who was nearest the gate, stopped hopping about after a stone he was endeavouring to get into position, and gazed in the direction of the gateway.

"What's up?" asked Trimmer.

"I can hear somebody shouting," he replied.

They were all still, and he was undoubtedly right. The sound seemed to come from a distance, or to proceed from some person whose mouth was muffled.

"What can it be?" muttered Pesketh.

"Let us go as far as the gate and see what we can make of it," suggested Trimmer.

This they did, going as far as the bridge, where they came to a full stop, half-stunned with amazement and terror.

Tearing towards them from the direction of the path was a man, whose clothes were in tatters. He was hatless, and all over his head and face was something white, which looked like chalk, and eventually proved to be flour.

It was all over his face; his eyes and mouth seemed to be full of it; and as he still shouted in a sputtering fashion, the effect of the cry apparently coming from a greater distance was accounted for.

"Help!" he cried; "save me. I am a dead man!"

They did not make way for him because they could not, but he dashed through them into the castle, upsetting Trimmer and Pesketh in his wild flight.

They quickly got upon their feet again, but only, to their horror, to see another figure coming up the path.

This time there was no doubt about the personage.

It was the wild man who had attacked Dibble and bitten his arm.

As on that occasion, he wore apparel that may be described as purely vegetable, because it was to the eye nothing but leaves.

In his right hand he carried a club, and his smoke and dirt-begrimed countenance was distorted with passion.

As an additional element of terror in his coming, he was uttering the most horrible sounds, more in harmony with a wild beast than anything human.

The terrified trio lost not a moment in getting through the gates, which they closed with all speed, and while they were making them fast the club of the wild man struck one of the iron-studded panels with tremendous force. The blow would have shattered an ordinary gate.

"Out!" shouted a hoarse voice. "Bring him out!"

Then he must have sprung at the gate with a wonderful agility, for they saw his fingers clutch the top of it. But he did not get sufficient hold, for they slipped off, and they heard him drop, stagger, and fall. The roar he sent out was alarming.

"Down with the portcullis," gasped Dibble; "he will eat us!"

Trimmer had just strength to lower it, and only just in time, for the wild man made another spring, got a firmer hold, and drew himself up to the top of the gate.

But all he could do was to grin through the bars, and growl out all sorts of threats in scarcely intelligible tones, the words coming hoarsely from his foam-flecked lips.

The three boys slowly retreated, staring at him aghast; but as soon as they were well within the courtyard he dropped once more, and vanished for good and all that day.

CHAPTER CXI.

A TERRIBLE TALE.—THE CLOSED CHAMBERS IN THE TOWER.



FROM thoughts of the terrible creature recently at the gate the thoughts of the boys turned to the strange being who a few moments before had sought refuge in the castle.

They moved slowly across the courtyard, hardly daring to follow on his trail, until a perfect yell

of laughter was heard from the direction of the great hall.

"I know what it is," cried Dibble, excitedly. "I fancied I knew him as he bolted past us. It's Farrell!"

"Never," said Trimmer.

"It is—I'll bet you my dinner. Hear them!"

There could be no peril in going where laughter was, so they went in, and found about two-score boys in convulsions.

As soon as they could get anyone in a condition to answer the questions they put, they learnt that it was the schoolmaster.

"All in tatters," laughed Terry, "and floured like a twelfth-cake. Where has he been, and what has he been doing?"

Then the trio, who had seen more than this, told the story of the coming of the wild man, which somewhat sobered down the jubilant spirits of the listeners.

Mr. Farrell, it seemed, had bolted away upstairs, and they must await his return, clothed in his right mind, ere they would get the full particulars of his adventures.

He made the relation a matter of dramatic display, calling the school together in the courtyard immediately after tea. To give due effect to his address, he brought out a chair and mounted upon it.

Neither his wife nor daughter graced the meeting with their presence; but all others were there, including the precious trio of niggers, who were on the broad grin.

"Boys," said Mr. Farrell, "after a series of appalling adventures I have returned to you safe and sound, and, considering all things, in fair bodily health."

He paused, with the hope of getting a sympathetic cheer, but none was offered him. With a slight frown on his brow, he proceeded:

"I watched your memorable combat with those villainous Spaniards, and I must say that you did more than justice to the training you have received under my care."

"Oh! oh! oh!" chorused the boys.

"You may 'oh' as much as you like," he said, tartly; "but if I have not trained you, who has?"

There was a perfect yell of "Jim Gordon and Morse," which seemed to so much exasperate him that he was obliged to relieve his feelings by dancing the goose-step for a time. But as quietude was restored, he went on.

"The fight was just over when I went forth to see if I could be of any assistance to the wounded. A glance inside the fort showed me that I was not required, so I sauntered up behind it, and for a time contemplated the scene. My contemplations

were cut short by my receiving a blow on the head that completely scattered my wits."

"A very little blow would do that," muttered Terry, and then there was a general titter.

"When I came to," continued the schoolmaster, "I found myself chained to a tree in the wood. It was by the same chain which I believe was on one occasion used to keep the bear, which, against my wishes, you still keep in the school."

It was impossible to help it. They all laughed again, including the men. There was something peculiarly humorous, and at the same time very gratifying, in contemplating the schoolmaster chained by the leg to a tree. It was, as Trimmer remarked, so much like shackling a lamb.

"It may be funny," pursued Mr. Farrell, "but my position was serious. At the outset nobody was near me, but in about an hour—it might have been less, for time lagged with me—there appeared before me a monster in the shape of a man. He was clothed in a suit of clothes made out of leaves and what-not, and his face, begrimed with dirt, was the most ferocious I ever beheld. He flourished a club before my eyes, and—"

He stopped short, and put his hand to his side, as if the subject pained him. The boys did not laugh again, for they were getting deeply interested. A full minute elapsed ere the schoolmaster resumed:

"He demanded"—here he spoke very slowly, with a pause between each word—"the—hand—of—my—daughter—in—marriage!"

Amazement sat on every face. Of all things they expected to hear, this was the last. Jim felt the blood rush to his face, and a ray of curious light leaped into the eyes of Morse.

"Naturally," pursued Mr. Farrell, "I was more than indignant. I told the monster that such a thought could not be entertained by me for one moment. He then gave me time to think the matter over.

"For two nights and a day and a half," said Mr. Farrell, with emotion, "I was chained to that tree, hourly threatened with death, and defying the monster. He did not starve me, but gave me some awful sort of bread to eat, which I partook of with the idea that, sooner or later, I might have to struggle for my life. The night before last he left me all to myself, and I heard nothing of him till the day was well on. Then he came back with a sack of flour on his back, mixed some paste, and made some damper-cakes by baking—and I may say burning—them in the ashes of a wood fire."

Meaning glances were exchanged by the boys. The mystery of the overturned pyramid was accounted for.

"He led me to believe," resumed the schoolmaster,

"that he had a considerable quantity of provisions in store somewhere, and that while it lasted he would allow me to live if I did not make up my mind to grant his request. Should I continue obdurate, it was his intention then to eat me."

Still no more laughing, although many had a difficulty in controlling themselves. Mr. Farrell concluded his narrative with much dramatic action that reminded the lookers-on of a show at a fair.

"For twenty-four hours more I endured my hard lot, and then it occurred to me that I might act with diplomacy, or indeed subterfuge. There comes a time when the boldest general has to adopt expedients that revolt against his higher principles"—this brought out a general smile—"and, much against my will, I deceived the monster. I professed to agree with his demand, and offered to lead him to the castle, where he would be introduced to my daughter, and in due time—meaning, of course, no time—the marriage ceremony should be performed. He set me free, and I waited until we came to the castle path, which I recognised, and then I turned on the monster, knocked him down, and fled for my life."

He intimated by a wave of his hand that the rest they knew, and waited for some congratulations. Nobody seemed to be particularly pleased he had not been eaten, and none were offered him.

"Boys," he said, "after all I have done for you, and *how I have stood by you in your time of trouble*, I did not expect such a heartless reception of the story of my sufferings."

Having thus reproached them, he stalked into the castle, and left them to discuss what they had heard.

It was impossible to disbelieve him altogether, but there were some things in the narrative they could not swallow, particularly that portion dealing with his defiance of the wild man and holding out so long against his demands. Nor could they credit that he had knocked the monster down. Perhaps Morse's estimate of the story was very near the truth.

"He has told us some truth and some lies," he said, "but we may be certain that he has been in the power of the wild man, who floured his head so freely. He did not refer to that proceeding, which, in my belief, has a very comical side to it. We may also feel assured that the wild man is a very dangerous reality."

"We must hunt him out," said Jim.

"Or catch him in a trap," said Martin. "I think that I could in a few hours knock up something that will do the trick."

"A happy thought, Martin," said Jim. "Go to work to-morrow."

"I think I will start on the job," replied Martin. "If I can have a little help, it will be ready by the time we go to bed."

He looked at Jim, who at once volunteered his aid,

and having told the boys to amuse themselves until supper-time in the courtyard, he retired with the blacksmith.

CHAPTER CXII.

THE MAN-TRAP.—THE RESULT OF SETTING IT.



THERE was no forge in the castle, but something that would serve was routed out, and with hammers and the kitchen fire and sundry strips of iron Jim and Martin were busy until half-past eight o'clock. By that time a huge steel-fall was ready.

The idea in Martin's head was to set it just outside the gates and cover it with some light earth. It was also to be chained to an iron ring that was fixed in the wall by the parapet of the bridge.

"For you see, Gordon," he said, "as the chap is cracked, and has got Miss Eveline in his head, and is also anxious to see her father again, it's odds on his prowling round here in the night-time. He will likewise have another shy, perhaps, at trying to climb over the gate."

"There is a lot of sense in what you say, Martin," replied Jim, "and, with you, I think he *will* come again, and naturally choose the night-time."

Morse came in as they were finishing the job and sat upon the kitchen-table, watching them as they tested its action.

"It is strong enough to hold him, I hope?" he said.

"It will hold an ox if he gets into it," said Martin.

"I can tell you who it is before you nab him."

"Can you?"

"Yes; but I won't. I'll write it down on a piece of paper, and you, Jim, can put it in your pocket. But promise me you won't look at it."

"All right," assented Jim.

Morse wrote something on a strip of paper, and Jim put it into his pocket. Then they went out to set the trap.

It was heavy—more than three stone in weight—and it was looked at with a vast amount of curiosity by the boys as they passed through the hall.

It had teeth on the saw principle, but not so sharp. They would hold a man fast enough without cutting the skin.

And the action of it was that when sprung it was also locked, and no man not up to the trick of it could set himself free.

All round, in design and workmanship, it was a good piece of mechanism.

They carried it outside, and after a careful look round to see if they were watched by the bird they hoped to catch, carefully set it near the gate, and on the middle of the bridge.

Having secured it to the ring, it was covered with earth and small stones, and left.

"If that doesn't catch him," said Martin, "nothing will."

As the trap would act as well for anyone going as coming in, a warning was issued to all not to attempt to leave the castle on the morrow until the wild man was caught, or, in case of failure, the trap removed.

This was necessary, as very early in the morning Mrs. Farrell proposed to be up superintending the baking of bread, a class of manufacture in which many of the smaller boys were called on to assist.

But, as things turned out, Jim and Martin both awoke just as the first ray of morning light shone on the castle, and meeting in the hall as they descended from their sleeping-rooms, they went out to the gate together.

Before opening it they stood still and listened. There was no sound outside, save the soft sighing of the trees, stirred by the gentle morning breeze.

Martin lifted out the big bar that was the final fastening and drew back the bolts. Jim opened the gate.

"Nobody here," he said.

"But somebody has been here," said Martin, quickly, "and caught in the trap, too; but as he could not get out, he smashed it. We forgot he carries a heavy club."

"By George!" was all Jim could say, as he ruefully scratched his head and surveyed the broken ironwork of the trap strewn about the bridge.

The work of demolition had been effectually done. There was not one piece of steel left more than a few inches long, and on some pieces that formed the broken teeth they found drops of blood.

"The fellow got a stiffish nip," said Martin, "and perhaps, like a snared bird that manages to get free, he will not come here again."

"I shall never rest until he is caught," said Jim, as he turned back into the castle.

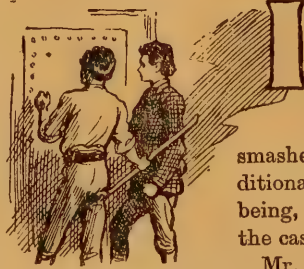
"A once trapped bird does not often come again," said Martin, "and the wilder they are the harder they are to catch."

"We must try something else," said Jim. "It will never do to live on in a dread uncertainty about the creature."

"No, sir," assented Martin, "that would be worse than anything we have as yet had to deal with."

CHAPTER CXIII.

THE SCHOOL RESUMED.—LETTERS FOR HOME.



It was a great disappointment to the boys that the wild man had not been caught, but the smashed trap gave an additional interest to this weird being, and none cared to leave the castle alone.

Mr. Farrell, thanks to his mysterious adventure, got on better terms with his wife, but she was very angry with him for letting Eveline know of the proposal of the wild man that she should be given to him for a wife. It was indiscreet, anyway, and the school-master got pretty well confounded all round for his lack of feeling and indiscretion.

"He must have been an idiot," was the general opinion, "to give her so much as a hint about it."

Eveline professed to laugh at the idea, but it was certain that the matter worried her. Jim could see it in her cautious way of going about even in the castle, when alone. And she showed a very strong disinclination to go outside alone or in company.

But three or four days passed by, and nothing more was seen of the weird creature of the woods. The notion entertained by Martin, that having been caught would act as a deterrent to his coming near the castle again, began to gain ground.

Confidence was in a measure restored, and the boys wandered round about the castle, going down below and even wandering in the wood at the rear, as if they were not threatened in any way.

During this time Jim and Morse had been busy in the tower, where the latter had found the rooms closed and locked.

At first they tried to pick the locks and failed. Then Morse introduced a little explosive material into the wards and blew them off.

As they were fixed inside they fell there, leaving no opening besides the keyhole. And the doors still held as firm as a sunken rock.

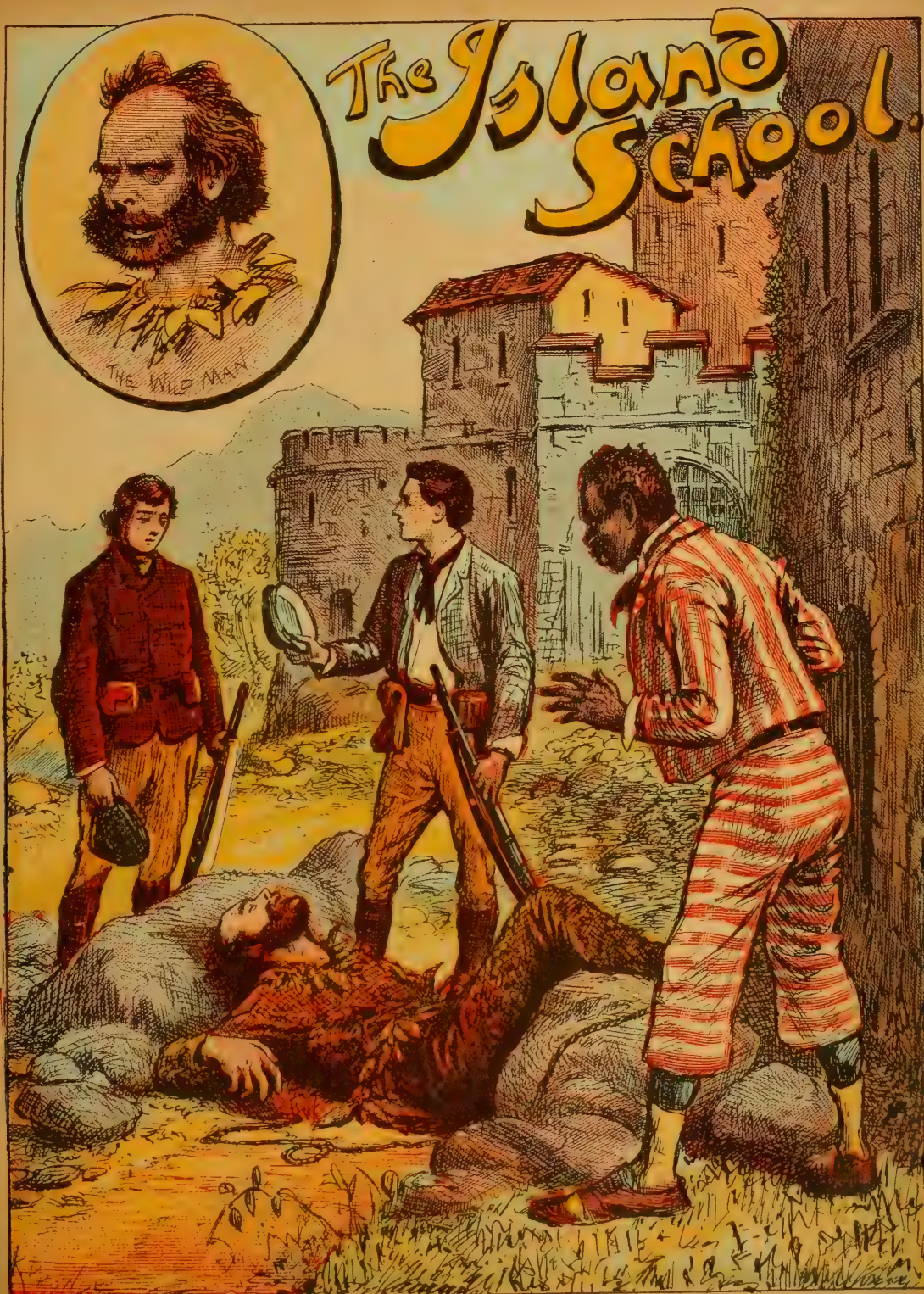
"They are barred inside," said Morse, "and strongly, too."

There could be no doubt about this, as on the outside there were no signs of nailing up or any other form of fastening.

It was the same in the case of all three chambers, and it was an inscrutable mystery, for, examine the tower how they might, they could find no indication

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



There at their feet lay all that was mortal of Mr. Groby, the second master, whose story of passion and suffering had ended there.

of any other staircase than that which they used themselves.

The two chums had worked alone in the matter, no other occupant of the castle seemingly taking the least interest in the tower.

There were three chambers in all, and every one was fast. They were also immediately above each other.

"This is a lick for us, Morse!" said Jim, on the evening of the third day, as they sat on the stairs with small iron crowbars in their hands; "we can't make the blessed doors budge a peg."

"They fit as close as wax," said Morse.

"Couldn't you blow them clean in?"

"Yes, at the risk of bringing the tower down."

Through the keyholes they could see nothing. Inside all was dark. The small orifices that served as windows were blocked.

And again a suggestion from Jim, that they should break away the woodwork of the door piecemeal, was foiled by the discovery that under a thin coating of woodwork the door was solid steel.

"There is some ancient mystery behind this," said Morse, tapping one of the doors as he lounged against it; "they were closed inside by somebody, who, in my belief, *never came out again*."

"Hang it!" exclaimed Jim, "there are three of them."

"I don't care if there are thirty. That is my view of it."

"But can you picture three persons making up their minds to shut themselves up at the same time in rooms one above another?"

"The rooms may communicate in some way."

"Ah! Just so! I never thought of that."

But whatever they might surmise, it gave them little comfort. They had to leave the subject where it had been all through—a mystery.

Mr. Farrell, who had gained confidence and was gradually becoming himself again, now announced that it was his intention to resume the school, and "for the present" the great hall would have to be used for educational as well as gastronomical and general purposes.

It was, he declared, a makeshift only until he could get men over from Spain, and have another house built.

"As for abandoning the school," he said, lightly, "I am not the man to be frightened by *trifling hitches* or *outside interference*. I trust those who have had the temerity to upset us here for a while will recognise that much now, and act accordingly."

This was a public statement he had the audacity to make in the presence of them all except Mrs. Farrell and Eveline, and it fairly took away the breath of the listeners.

"He must have a feeling that he can never be interfered with again," said Terry, "to make so bold an assertion."

He also once more urged on the boys the advisability of saying as little as possible in their letters for home—indeed, as before, he expressly interdicted it, but he did not insist upon reading the correspondence before it was despatched. His previous experience forbade it.

As the boats in the lagoon had been left untouched there was no difficulty about mails, provided anyone would take them out on the days when Spanish mail-boats might be expected to pass. Jim and his old assistants of course volunteered for this duty, and letters were prepared for home.

On that very evening Rainstone and Felton, for the first time since they were wounded, resumed their places at the general table. They were still weak, but full of life and spirits, and there is no doubt that returning to the old course of things would materially assist them towards convalescence, especially as there did not seem to be any probability of their wounds reopening.

Jim and Morse held a private consultation together about the state of things on the island, and afterwards called the council together and gave them their united opinion that the commands of Mr. Farrell with regard to letter-writing should be ignored.

"We think," said Jim, "that our friends at home ought to know how we are fixed. Nap is such an idiot that an infant school is as much as he can manage. Besides, there are a lot of little fellows here who ought not to be exposed to any further peril."

"We big fellows can make light of the affair," said Morse; "but school-keeping, under the circumstances, is a farce. For my part, if we are to live a wild life, at war with all kinds of savages, I would prefer doing it out and out."

"It is for others you speak, I know," said Rainstone, "and I think you are right. Unless something is done, the school will end with a horrible mess of some sort."

"Can't we hang Nap?" suggested Ganthony.

"If I thought it would help matters," said Steene, grimly, "I would make a gallows for him to-morrow."

"But it won't," said Jim. "My view of the case is this: if we could thin the school down to about fifty, with a *real* master—a man of pluck—at the head, we could enjoy life here. But with Nap, never. In times of peace he is an overbearing ass; in times of trouble he is a cur. These are hard words, I know, but he certainly deserves them."

A murmur of general assent followed this denunciation of the schoolmaster, and it was settled that the boys should be told to write home just as they

pleased—to tell everything, in fact, if they desired it.

"And let their letters be given straight to me," said Jim, "and I will see that they go."

It was a busy evening, writing the letters for home, and it was not until more than half were written that it was discovered they had no stamps. Here was a fix to be in! The whole stock had perished in the fire at the post-office.

"They must go without them," said Terry.

"But will the Spanish post take the letters?" asked Steene.

"We can try them," said Jim; "but it will be a staggerer—a whole bagful of unstamped letters!"

Mr. Farrell had no correspondence. He said there was absolutely nothing of importance for him to write about. He announced this in his most airy manner, and was promptly voted to be a bigger *something* than ever.

There was only one living thing in the castle before which Mr. Farrell quailed, and that was Charley. The sagacious animal was allowed full liberty, for everyone felt convinced that he was harmless when let alone. He treated Mr. Farrell with lofty contempt, passing him by when they met with the air of an aristocrat cutting an offending plebeian. But for all that, the schoolmaster lived in terror of him,

He had conceived in his mind a hundred ways of putting an end to Charley's existence, but there was always some hitch in the carrying out. Something could not be got, or the schoolmaster's courage failed him, as it did in most cases, and he lived on, hating and fearing the tamest bear that ever lived among men.

The mail was made up, and early on the following morning Jim, Lal Brodie, and Stiff departed with it. They took their rifles with them, against the orders of Mr. Farrell, who, seeing he was disobeyed, devoutly hoped they would shoot themselves or each other.

CHAPTER CXIV.

A DOUBLE MAIL.—JIM IS ENTRUSTED WITH A WARNING.



IT was a late autumn day, and a breeze of more than usual power was ruffling the sea. Jim had, by considering the date, come to the conclusion that there was a chance of not only sending letters off, but of getting

letters from home in return.

But the Spanish boats were never certain to a day.

Jim had more than once to lie in wait for the boat three days running, and twice the mail passed in the night.

If homeward bound, they lost it, but a bag of correspondence from home could be left, in case of such an accident, at Minorca, and brought back by the next returning boat. Anyway, Jim was not coming back all day unless he had the good fortune to catch both mails early in the day.

They went off in the original boat, all in high spirits, although Jim had to fight against a feeling of gloom. He could not account for it, but it was there, and would not be driven away.

The days were not so hot as they had been, but the sun when it was getting high shone warmly on the sea. Jim ran the felucca out about six miles, and then tacked to and fro with shortened sail.

Lal Brodie and Stiff amused themselves by fishing, running a line out with several hooks baited with pieces of red cloth. They caught several fish of the cod species, which they intended for broiling when they got home.

Two sailing vessels passed by the felucca, and the sailors on board hailed the boys as they stared at them, wondering what brought them to that lonely part of the sea. They were English vessels, and the men seemed to be particularly astonished when they were answered in the English tongue.

"Where's your ship?" roared one old mariner.

"Haven't one," cried Lal Brodie; "we are out for a spree."

"Shall I stand by and take you up?" was the next question.

"Thank you, no," roared Lal; "you're a jolly old cock, but we're all right."

The old man, who seemed to be a mate of the vessel, waved his hand cheerily, but he went his way with a puzzled look on his face, that kept the boys laughing long after he was out of hearing.

"I wonder what he will make of us in a yarn now?" said Lal.

"He will swear we are the ghosts of shipwrecked boys," replied Jim. "Of course it fogs him, seeing us out here near nothing better than an island supposed to be inhabited by a few Spanish gipsies."

The hours passed away and the afternoon arrived. Jim was beginning to think that neither of the mail boats would arrive, when his attention was attracted towards a small boat that was sailing down towards them. He recognised it as one of the familiar boats that had a little time before been at the island with a band of men who had been practically annihilated.

It came towards them, but he would not beat a retreat, and bade his friends get their rifles ready in case they should be required.

"If they come too near," he said, "and refuse to sheer off, I will make no bones about firing into them."

But as the boat drew nearer he saw that it was very small, with one occupant only.

Seeing it was a woman, he had no doubt it was Lucia di Valo, and wondered what could have brought the woman that way again. But, woman as she was, he would not trust her, and decided on commanding her to keep aloof. When she came near enough he called upon her to sheer off, and she brought her boat round into the eye of the wind.

Jim's boat was only just moving, and they floated rather than sailed, side by side.

"I see you," said Lucia, standing up and pointing a finger at them. "Ah! you think you have done so well, but you are doomed!"

"I care not a straw for your threats," replied Jim, "Whatever befell your friends they brought upon themselves. We have nothing to charge ourselves with, and nothing to regret."

"See here," cried Lucia, smiting her breast, "empty—a blank. I have no friends to fill the void. But others are coming to avenge the slain. You will not be able to withstand them. I know it. Therefore, I come to bid you fly if you would escape captivity that will last while you live."

"We were threatened before," answered Jim, "and then we came out of our trouble better than those who made it. Where is Espardo Reonardo?"

The question was not exactly intended as a taunt, but rather as a declaration of a fact to show that he had no reason to fear.

On Lucia it had a maddening effect, for she flung up her arms and uttered a piercing shriek. Then with a warning finger again extended, she continued her threats, the words bubbling from her lips.

"He who comes next will be invincible. And mark this: it is *I* who set him on your track. Yet not so much on yours," she added, with a sudden softening in her voice as she looked at Jim, "as at the rest, for whom I care not. *You* I came to warn. Them I leave to their fate. Death if they resist—captivity if they yield. You do not believe me?"

"No," said Jim, rather curtly. He was not particularly thankful to receive an implied compliment from her conveyed in the assurance that she had come to warn him, while the rest were to suffer.

"As you please—fool!" she hissed. "I waste my time—my thoughts—my heart!"

It is impossible to convey in written words the passion conveyed in this latter part of her utterance. It thrilled the listeners, and Lal Brodie afterwards vowed he saw fire flash from her eyes.

As the last word fell from her lips, she pulled the sail taut, and put the helm up so that her boat headed

before the wind. It was a wonderfully light boat, and the way it skimmed over the sea reminded one of a swallow.

"Well," said Stiff, "she has taken herself off in a huff."

"There is something in her words I should like to understand," returned Jim, thoughtfully, "so that I might be prepared."

"It is all bunkum," said Lal.

"I cannot agree with you," replied Jim. "She came for a purpose, and she has fulfilled it, but not in the way she anticipated. I am sorry I upset her."

CHAPTER CXV.

A STARTLING ERUPTION AT SCHOOL TIME.



IT was past eight o'clock when the three boys came back. They had been successful in intercepting both the mail boats, and each had a sack of mail matter on his shoulder.

They were hailed with acclamation by

the expectant boys, and the sacks were seized with the idea of opening and sorting them. But Jim declared that everything should be done in due order, as the school had resumed its normal discipline, and Mr. Farrell was sent for to arrange about the sorting. About the delivery there would be no difficulty.

Accordingly Mr. Farrell came down, and the sorting was done in the great hall, because there was no other place that was convenient for it. And it suited the boys, too, because the schoolmaster, being under their eyes, could not play any tricks with their correspondence.

Most of the boys had something from their friends, and Mr. Farrell had two letters, one from the tourist agent who had assisted him to acquire the island. It was short, if it was not particularly sweet.

"DEAR SIR,—A woman of middle life and determined aspect called at the office the other day and made some inquiries concerning your island school. As our reputation does not permit us to tell anything but the absolute truth, I gave her such information as is warranted by your recent letters. She went away expressing a determination to come over and see for herself how it is conducted, and if she is not satisfied, it is her intention to 'have the law of you,' as she put it. I thought I would drop you a line so that you might be prepared. She left no name."

"I wonder who the woman can be?" muttered the schoolmaster; "anyway, whoever she may be, I fancy

she will have a job to get here. If she comes by the overland route, as I hope she will, she runs a chance of being seized by Spanish brigands."

This thought gave him considerable satisfaction and a sense of relief. The second letter, however, enlightened him as to the personality of the middle-aged woman referred to.

It will better serve our purpose to give this letter verbatim:

"MR. FARRELL:

"SIR,—It having come to my knowledge that you have started your island school for the sole purpose of filling your pockets with money, and that you eventually intend to sell all the boys to the Moors in Algiers as slaves, I feel it my duty, in the interests of my nephew Oscar, to take a trip to the island of Fermentera to verify this information, or to prove it to be false. My medical man has also recommended me to take a sea voyage or visit the Continent, to recruit my health. I am therefore enabled to kill two birds with one stone.

"Yours faithfully,

"ELEGANTINE DIBBLE.

"P.S.—Should my information be correct, I shall take measures to have you arrested and punished."

The feelings of Mr. Farrell, as he read this peculiar epistle, cannot be described. Indignation, fear, and a conviction that he was about to be made ridiculous, struggled for the mastery. In a voice that stilled the hubbub of the room, he roared out:

"Dibble!"

The owner of this name nearly jumped out of his boots with fright. He, too, had received a letter from his aunt, in which she expressed a hope that it would reach him "before he was sold into nigger slavery," an enigmatical sentence to him, that, in Yankee parlance, made him "squirm."

Knowing nothing of the report of which she had given Mr. Farrell particulars, poor Dibble knew not what to make of the allusion to slavery. He feared it was the intention of his aunt to have him sold somewhere where that infamous institution was in force. In his heart of hearts he fully believed her capable of it.

As he was not able to reply for the moment, Mr. Farrell roared out again:

"Dibble! are you deaf?"

"No-o-o, sir!" was the stammering reply.

"Then come here."

Dibble went there, which was at the upper end of the room furthest from the door of Morse's laboratory. Mr. Farrell had conceived such a deep respect for that place that he kept now as far away from it as possible.

"I have received a letter from your aunt," said Mr. Farrell, eyeing the hapless boy viciously.

"So ha-ve-e I, sir," said Dibble.

"I have nothing to do with *your* letters," said Mr. Farrell, viciously; "I spoke of one I had received."

"Ye-e-s, sir."

"Yes, sir, indeed! And a very nice letter it is. What sort of a woman is your aunt?"

Dibble reflected a moment, and then replied:

"Pretty warm, sir."

An angry gesture from the schoolmaster startled him. He hastened to add:

"More than warm, sir. A hot 'un!"

"What do you mean by that?" again thundered Mr. Farrell.

"She's down on everybody, sir," gasped the unhappy Dibble. "She's the terror of the place where she lives. She even makes the butcher's boy tremble when he comes for orders, sir."

This seemed to be to Dibble about the strongest piece of evidence he could offer of his aunt's terror-inspiring powers. Mr. Farrell also appeared to think the information of importance.

"Your aunt is coming here," he said, "and she threatens me with violence, because she hears I have an idea of selling you for a slave. Did you send that falsehood to her?"

"No, sir," answered the astonished Dibble. "I never dreamt of such a thing."

"She has been imposed upon; but that is no reason why she should come here to annoy *me*. I trust it is only a threat. Resume your seat."

Dibble went back to his seat, muttering, as he settled into it:

"He may think she won't come, but if she says she is coming, she will be here before long. If she made up her mind to *walk* across the Atlantic, she would do it."

From this little episode arose a yearning among the boys for the coming of Dibble's aunt. Life at the school had settled down, and there was no excitement, although there was undoubted enjoyment.

All fear of a further visit from the wild man subsided, for it was believed that, ere he had freed himself from the trap, he must have done himself considerable injury. The probability was that he had crawled away to some distant hole—his lair, and there, like an injured rat, pined away and died.

Chorker resumed his post as master boatman, and the boys went down each morning for their swim, although the water was getting somewhat chilly, and Martin and the rest of the men were busy cutting down timber, and sawing it in preparation for the building of new workshops.

Believing that all peril was past, Mr. Farrell had determined on carrying on the school, but henceforth in the castle.

There was a ghostliness about it that he did not quite like, and he was especially interested, in a tremulous way, in the chambers Morse had been unable to open, and for a century, at least, had never been opened at all. But the castle was cheap,

as there was no landlord, and without assistance from workmen from the mainland he could not hope to erect another building that would meet scholastic and living requirements.

So matters went on until such winter as they get in the sunny Mediterranean was at hand. There were occasional gales and thunderstorms, and the leaves of the more tender trees were withering somewhat, although the bare branches all round which we are familiar with at home, were unknown there.

When the days were fine there was a wintry clearness about the air, although, beyond a little rime at night, there was no frost. On one of these particularly fine mornings, the boys, on their way down to the beach, noticed a Spanish brig standing in close, but thought nothing more of it than that it was owing to the westerly wind that it came so near the island.

Those who were inclined had their dip and went back to breakfast. Afterwards they had half an hour's play in the courtyard, and then the hall being in order, the school-work began.

Some of the elder boys assisted the masters, and there was the usual hum attending the conning of lessons, when the semi-stillness was broken by a ringing sound as of metal striking stone coming from the courtyard.

Immediately afterwards an authoritative voice in Spanish was heard giving a command, and the door of the hall was thrown open.

A dandified Spaniard in some gorgeous uniform, military or diplomatic, strode in, and behind him came a dozen soldiers armed with rifles and swords.

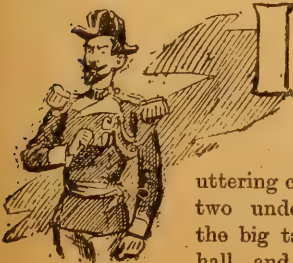
"Senor Farrell!" he cried, in a thunderous voice.

"Here!" quavered the owner of that name.

"Senor," said the new-comer, "I place you and all in the castle under arrest!"

CHAPTER CXVI.

THE SCHOOL IN CUSTODY.—THE DON'S DECISION.



IF a tornado had swept into the room the immediate confusion could not have been greater. The boys all sprang to their feet uttering cries of astonishment, the two undermasters dived under the big table in the centre of the hall, and Mr. Farrell, limp with alarm, slid off his seat and sat upon the floor with his mouth open and his eyes so far out of his head that they seemed to be quite independent of it.

"Silence!" was the next command of the leader of the Spaniards, "no threats—no attempt at resistance, on your lives! Men, cover them!"

The rifles were brought to the present, and the bearers looked as if they would have enjoyed letting fly into the thick of the youngsters.

Fortunately the boys were instantly dumb.

Loweringly the haughty Spaniard gazed around, and seeing there was no likelihood of resistance, motioned to his men to drop their arms. The soldiers uncocked them, and the butts rang upon the pavement that served as a flooring. It was a repetition of the sound the boys had heard in the courtyard.

"I, Don Alguia Marbalo," said the Spaniard, "am here by command of her Majesty, the Queen of Spain. Senor, will you get up and resume your seat?"

He addressed Mr. Farrell, who, with chattering teeth, said.

"Cer-tain-ly-y-y, sir."

Then the two undermasters, without waiting to be addressed, crept out of their hiding-places and stealthily resumed their seats. They sat with their heads low, hoping to escape notice, but they were soon singled out.

"Ah—two others. There are more men in the place," said Don Alguia Marbalo. "Where are they?"

"In the-e-e wo-o-od, cu-ut-ting ti-i-amber," replied Mr. Farrell.

"Let them be summoned hither."

Jim promptly volunteered for this service. He dashed off to the wood behind the castle, where Martin and all the other men were busy in the work specified by Mr. Farrell.

"Martin," said Jim, without making a show of alarm or uneasiness, "a big Spanish don and fifty soldiers have arrived, and we are all under arrest."

"Murder!" exclaimed Chorker.

"It is useless to resist," continued Jim, "I feel that. We had better see what they intend to do with us. The soldiers are regulars, very different from the rapsallions we recently settled."

Martin looked as if he would rather have had a fight for liberty, but as Jim rapidly explained what had happened, he saw the futility of it.

"Come along, lads!" he said, shouldering the axe he had been using.

Outside Martin, the men were not a formidable body. Sleery was a muscular man, but of quiet, unobtrusive bearing. Truebery, Partridge, and Waffle were typical men of their trades.

Changeling slouched along by the side of Martin, and Chorker, in a blue funk, modestly brought up the rear.

"If I'd ha' known what sort of messes I was to get in here," he muttered, "I'd have swept a crossin' afore they got me to come. Into one hole—hout of

it somehow—and then into another. That's the life here. Quite a pennyrammer of incidentals."

In the hall the Don was found busy cross-examining the schoolmaster on some matter, but he ceased as the men entered, and looked them over with knitted brows.

"You know why I am here?" he asked, in good English.

Martin bowed. The rest looked an affirmative reply.

"Good. Then are you prepared to yield yourselves quietly?"

"That is what we do, sir. There is no help for it."

"My instructions," continued Don Alguia, "are to take the parole of those who are too willing to give it, and to place those who will not on board my vessel now lying at anchor off the shore."

He pointed in the direction of the sea, and waited for some further assent on their part. All were willing to give their parole. What else could they do?

"So far, well," continued the Don. "Now I can inform you that you have been denounced by one Lucia di Valo, a native of Minorca, who has lost her affianced husband on this island. I have the particulars of her accusation, which I will read when I open my court on the morrow. Meanwhile, this playing at school-keeping must be abandoned, and your young men are at liberty to roam about. I wish them to leave this chamber, and all men except the one who is the head."

He looked at Mr. Farrell, who quaked in his shoes. With a motion of his hand the Don dismissed his soldiers also. He could see that there was nothing to be feared from the violence of Mr. Farrell.

When they were alone, Don Alguia Marbalo paced up and down the hall for a while, with the long, measured stride of a stage-brigand. Occasionally he glanced at Mr. Farrell, who was the very image of dejection and alarm.

"Senor!" suddenly exclaimed the Don.

"Ye-e-es, sir," responded Mr. Farrell.

"It has been conceived by our Government that this so-called school of yours is a training academy for young soldiers, and that you have ulterior designs on this group of islands."

"His Excellency the Governor is mistaken," answered the schoolmaster.

"It is a school, pure and simple, then?"

"It is."

"I am not disposed to believe you. The forts outside—the way your young men——"

"Some are but children, Don. They range from eleven to sixteen."

"Age is nothing. Can you deny that some of my countrymen have been slain on this island?"

"I cannot; but not by my hand."

"That I can well believe," was the sneering re-

joinder. "Now come to the point. Who was the greatest historical foe of Spain during the last century? Go back to the beginning of it—the time of Wellington."

"Napoleon, I suppose," said Mr. Farrell, after a few moments' reflection.

"Just so. And what is your name?"

"Fa-a-a-arrell."

"No, no. Pray do not fence with the question. You have another name."

"Ye-e-es. It is Na-a-ap-apo-o-oleon."

As Mr. Farrell made this admission, he confounded his name and the father who gave it to him. Don Alguia surveyed him loweringly.

"It was the name of your father before you!" he said, with a growl.

The schoolmaster admitted it reluctantly.

"It is your right name, I suppose? You have the Corsican's blood in your veins. The Farrell is an English addition to save you from the hatred of your countrymen."

"I assure you," said Mr. Farrell, earnestly, "that my name is nothing. A mere bit of fa-a-ancy work on the part of my father, who was a bit of a fool. We are English to the backbone!"

"Indeed!" sarcastically returned the Don. "I doubt it. Now hear me. We know in Spain—at least, the Governor of Minorca does—that the Bonaparte family is never at rest. As the descendants of the hideous brigand who devastated Europe and called it glory, they are ever scheming to get back to power. It is in their blood, even in the most cowardly of them."

There was a world of meaning in the emphasis he put on the word "cowardly," and it went home to Mr. Farrell's heart. The Don resumed:

"Now which is the weakest nation of Europe at this moment?"

"I—I don't know."

"Oh, yes, you do. All the world knows. It is Spain. We admit it, because it cannot be denied. Now we know—that is, my friend, Don Carlos Spartola, Governor of Minorca, knows—that the Napoleon family have their eye on Spain, and intend to first lay their accursed claws on our beloved country. It is their intention to make Minorca and adjacent islands the basis of operations. You, as one of the family, are sent here to test the capabilities of this island as a first foothold."

"I assure you——"

"Peace! You have done well. With a handful of youths and boys you have succeeded in routing many men, and shedding some of the best blood of—of—Minorca."

"We are all English here," said Mr. Farrell, despairingly; "it can be proved."

"It *must* be proved," replied Don Alguia, gravely, "and that speedily, or you will be confined for life in a dungeon. It will be impossible, of course, to imprison all with you. It is not requisite, nor expedient, seeing that your Government—I call the English Government yours—will not permit of such a wholesale proceeding without investigation. You they will not care a fig about."

"I must have time," said Mr. Farrell, desperately. "It is necessary for me to communicate with friends in England——"

"Pooh! In England they will rejoice at our promptly nipping this attempt in the bud. Europe will be spared a devastating war, and the Governor of Minorca will be covered with glory, which will be reflected upon *me*. He will also be flooded with wealth, of which I hope to get my share."

"How long will you give me to prove that I am an Englishman, with no designs upon your country?" groaned Mr. Farrell.

"Two days," was the curt reply.

At this moment the door that opened on the stairs leading to the upper part of the castle was opened, and Mrs. Farrell and Eveline appeared.

It so happened that the Don had strolled to the courtyard entrance, and was looking out on the boys at play and his men, curiously watching their games. They did not perceive him.

"Why have the boys been dismissed so early?" demanded Mrs. Farrell. "It is making a farce of the school."

Mr. Farrell gestured in the direction of the Don, who, on hearing a woman's voice, wheeled about, and coming forward, doffed his hat politely.

"I was not aware," he said, "that there were ladies in the castle."

"My wife and daughter," said Mr. Farrell, feebly.

"Charmed," said the Don, looking approvingly at Eveline, although he bowed in the direction of her mother.

Mrs. Farrell and her daughter looked from the Don to Mr. Farrell and back again, completely mystified. The schoolmaster made an attempt to explain.

"I am suspected," he said, miserably, "of meditating an invasion of Spain."

The utter absurdity of the supposition struck both Eveline and Mrs. Farrell so comically, that they burst into hearty laughter that made the rafters of the hall ring with merriment.

When it had subsided a bit and they were wiping their eyes, the Don said:

"You do not believe, fair senoras?"

"No, indeed," replied Mrs. Farrell.

"It has been the characteristic conduct of all the Napoleons," said the Don, gravely, "to conceal their plans and purposes, even from those they love. I

cannot accept a burst of merriment, even from the fairest of women, as proof, but, in the full conviction that this man is guilty, I refuse to accept *his* parole, and he will be put into some place of confinement. A file of men, there. At once!"

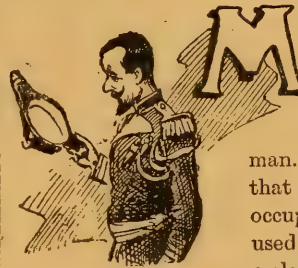
As he uttered this command, Mrs. Farrell ceased to smile. She saw there was more in it than she suspected. Two of the soldiers entered the hall, and, at a word, took up a position on either side of the terrified schoolmaster. He looked appealingly at his wife, who addressed the Don on his behalf.

"It is all an absurd mistake," she said.

"It may be so," said the Don, "although the Governor of Minorca is not usually absurd. Will you show me a chamber where this man may be confined?"

CHAPTER CXVII.

MRS. FARRELL AND THE SPANIARDS.—ANOTHER ARRIVAL.



MRS. FARRELL led the way up to the chamber her husband had occupied since he had escaped from the wild man. It was a room adjoining that which she and Eveline occupied, and which they used as a sitting as well as a sleeping apartment.

Mr. Farrell's chamber made a satisfactory prison, and arrangements were made for two men to occupy it with him for the present. There would be a change of attendants, of course, but he would not be allowed to be there alone again until he had satisfactorily proved his innocence—a contingency that appeared to his distracted mind to be very remote.

Don Alguia was remarkably attentive to Mrs. Farrell and Eveline, particularly to the latter.

He was a typical Spaniard of thirty, good-looking, in a dark, even-featured way, immensely satisfied with himself, and, when he wanted to be agreeable, as oily as a box of sardines about the tongue. Having seen Mr. Farrell disposed of, he asked Mrs. Farrell if she would stroll outside with him "to confer upon the situation." She assented, as she wished to humour him, and Eveline accompanied them.

The courtyard and the space in front of the castle was thronged with boys and men on parole. Strolling about them, the Spanish soldiers smoked their cigarettes and chatted in their native tongue.

"It is so noisy here," said Don Alguia, suavely; "shall we stroll down the pathway to the sands?" They unsuspectingly accepted his offer, and he

talked to them as he went down, not on the situation, but on the charms of his "noble home in Minorca."

"I share a palace with Don Carlos Spartola, who is governor of the island."

It was one way of admitting that he was a dependent of that mighty functionary, but they took little heed of what he was saying. Both were busy with their thoughts.

On reaching the lower ground he chanced to direct his gaze towards the ruin of the schoolhouse. Of its history he evidently knew nothing.

"That was our home," said Mrs. Farrell, "burnt by those villains whom our brave boys thrashed in the end."

"So," he exclaimed, raising his eyebrows, "they did that! But why? What was their motive for coming to the island?"

Mrs. Farrell knew, but she hesitated to say, because she knew it would be distasteful to Eveline.

"You must ask those—who survive," she said.

Don Algua shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not a pleasant subject for us," he said. "Let us talk of something else."

He pointed out to them the boat that had brought him and his men ashore, lying close to where the boys' boats were stranded. Half a dozen lazy-looking sailors were lounging upon the sands beside them.

"Outside the lagoon," he said, "lies the 'Guadalquivir,' my ship. It is a noble vessel."

"You are fortunate," said Eveline, somewhat scornfully. "All that you possess is noble."

"It is so," he answered, taking her words seriously, "but I lack one thing"—here his voice melted down to a tone expressive of ultra-tenderness—"and that is—will you not guess?"

"I was never good at riddles," replied Eveline, coldly. She was beginning to hate him.

"A wife," he said, pathetically. "Alas! the only music heard in my noble home is the guitar."

"Have you brought it with you?" asked Mrs. Farrell.

"It is in my cabin on the 'Guadalquivir.' Will you come on board and hear me play and sing?"

Mrs. Farrell was about to say "Yes," but catching Eveline's eye, which expressed dissent, she excused herself.

The Don was about to press his request, when his attention was distracted by the entrance of a small felucca into the bay. It was managed by two men, one of whom sat in the stern, and by his side a woman of uncertain age, say something in the fifties. She wore an old-fashioned poke-bonnet perched on the top of her head, a plaid woollen shawl, and a dress of blue bombazine.

Her air was that of a woman who, when she made

up her mind, did not allow the minds of other people to interfere with her ruling.

This was such an amazing spectacle that all the trio of lookers-on gazed dumbly until the felucca was in the most unceremonious way run ashore. It was done in a way that suggested intoxication or total lack of skill on the part of those who managed the boat.

The jerk being a violent one, both the man at the stern and the woman at his side were thrown forward on their hands and knees. The woman was the first to rise, and it was then seen that she had a big sunshade with a very long handle, and an Alpine crook at the end of it.

"You lazy, idle vagabonds, what do you mean by it?" she cried, in a voice that was like the screech of a small steam-pipe.

Before either of the men could reply, she had fetched each a thwack over the head with her sunshade, and stepping out of the boat, she revealed the fact that she possessed big feet, clad in cloth boots tipped with patent leather.

"Bring along my box," she said, imperatively, addressing the men, who were rubbing their heads ruefully.

They were round-faced, chubby-looking men, types of contented Spanish fishermen. One of them seemed to understand what she wanted, although her language was evidently incomprehensible to him, for he picked up a small trunk and hopped ashore with it with remarkable agility.

By this time the men in charge of the Don's boat were on their feet, staring at the new-comer with eyes that threatened to shoot out of their heads.

"Never in all my life," said the new-comer, addressing herself to creation generally, "have I had such a time before, traipsing over the sea from Spain with a pair of jabbering idiots who can't speak a word of the easiest language under the sun, which is English."

She now caught sight of Mrs. Farrell, who was advancing towards her; and bobbing a courtesy, she said:

"Nice day, ma'am. Do you live on this island?"

"I do," was the reply.

"Then perhaps you know Mr. Farrell?"

"I am Mrs. Farrell."

"Indeed! Then I may as well tell you that I am Oscar Dibble's aunt. Which is the way to the school?"

"I am sorry to tell you," said Mrs. Farrell, "that there is all that remains of it."

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Miss Elegantine Dibble. "I've dreamt it dozens of times, and now it's come true. All the precious boys and my darling Oscar have been burnt in their beds alive!"

And then, without any more ado, she flopped down upon the sands and fainted away.

CHAPTER CXVIII.

MISS DIBBLE IS MADE CAPTIVE.



LYING at full length upon the ground, Miss Dibble was more of a painful object than a poetical one to contemplate. For a brief spell those who witnessed her collapse were in a quandary. They did not know what to do.

"Will you please raise her head, while I fan her?" said Eveline, addressing the Spaniard.

He smiled and did as he was told, conveying by his looks that it was for Eveline's sake he did it. Eveline and her mother fanned the unconscious woman for a time, and then she opened her eyes.

It happened that at that very moment Don Alguva Marbalo was bending over her and thinking of Eveline at the same time. There was a most tender expression in his eyes.

Miss Elegantine Dibble softly sighed, and nestled closer to him.

"Pardon," he said, hastily, "but you are better. Permit me assist you to your feet."

"I am still very faint," murmured Miss Dibble.

"Pardon again," said the Don, firmly, "but it is necessary. My duties call me away. If you will not rise, you must be laid out on the ground."

"Hoity-toity, young man!" cried Miss Dibble, with a snort, "I can get along without your help. Out of my way!"

She elbowed him aside, and as he happened to be stooping with bent knees, she jerked him over into a sitting position. It was most undignified and ludicrous.

Eveline laughed so heartily that she was quite ashamed of herself. Miss Dibble rose to her feet, and shaking the enormous stick of the sunshade under his nose, said:

"If you think, you foreign jackanapes, that I want your help, it is like your impudence. I consider your touch an insult—contamination! Why don't you get up, instead of squatting there like a basket-maker?"

"I am at liberty to do as I please," he answered, with a frown. "Keep a soft tongue, woman, or you may find yourself arrested."

"I should like to see any foreign popinjay who dares arrest me!" said Miss Elegantine Dibble. "Now, ma'am," she added, turning to Mrs. Farrell, "please tell me how the catastrophe by which I lost my sweet nephew came about."

"The schoolhouse was burnt by a gang of low

Spaniards," replied Mrs. Farrell, "but none of the boys lost their lives."

"None? Not even my nephew?"

"No."

"I might have thought it," sighed Miss Dibble. "The perversity of that boy is wonderful."

"Will you come up to the castle and see him?" asked Eveline.

"The castle?"

"Yes, we have to live in a castle now."

"Built, I suppose, with the insurance money?"

"The schoolhouse," said Mrs. Farrell, "was not insured."

"Well, you are a rum lot of people," said Miss Dibble. "Yes, I will go with you. You, sir," to the man who had been standing hard by with her small trunk, looking on the scene with varied emotions, "go on ahead. I must keep my eye on you. If any of you foreign scaramouches think you can rob me, try it, and see what will be the end of you."

Eveline wished to get away from the company of Don Alguva, and, leaving him with her mother, she escorted Miss Dibble to the castle.

On the way there the elder lady talked without ceasing, but her eyes were never off the man with the trunk. So long as he did not show a disposition to get too far ahead she let him be, but the moment he attempted—being a naturally active man—to get along quicker than was comfortable for the lady, she laid hold of his instep with the crook of her sunshade and pulled him up short.

At first this method of procedure resulted in his falling heavily with the box, and some wordy warfare, each in their own tongue, between him and Miss Dibble. The lady fired eighty-ton guns at him, and he answered with a feeble fizzle of small-arms.

But he soon got more wary, and was ready for the crook, so that the moment it touched him he pulled up short.

That he was terrified by the prompt ways of Miss Elegantine was certain. It was shown in the shifting of his eyes when they exchanged a few words, and Eveline was as much amused as she would have been by the choicest pantomime on the stage.

The arrival of such a party caused the greatest surprise among the boys, who stopped their sports to stare at the gaunt woman as she looked among them for her nephew.

But Dibble had already espied her, and, shaking in his small boots, he bobbed down behind Trimmer, and in a whisper bade him report on the movements of his aunt.

"Does she look very savage?" he asked.

"Murderous," replied Trimmer; "and she is staring about her as if she can't make up her mind whom to worry first."

"She wants *me*!" groaned Dibble.

"Is my nephew here?" asked Miss Elegantine Dibble at this juncture.

"Dibble! Dibble!" roared the delighted boys.

The coming of Miss Elegantine opened up a prospect of fun. You see, she was not *their* aunt.

Dibble thought he had better come out and show himself. From old-time experience he knew that it would lessen the weight of her words, and perhaps actions.

"I am here, auntie," he said, bobbing up, and coming meekly forward.

The stern bearing of the aunt and the sheepish bearing of the nephew made a delightful contrast. But for the whispering of the spirit of good manners, the boys must have roared.

Poor Dibble! He advanced to his aunt and stood before her meekly, with his head bent down.

"Well," she exclaimed, "is this the way you greet your loving relative who brought you up? Haven't you one spark of affection? Is it too much trouble to kiss me, after being separated so long?"

"No, aunt," said Dibble, raising his eyes. "I shall be very glad to kiss you, if you wish it."

She stooped as if she had a hinge somewhere in the middle of her back, and Dibble kissed her on the cheek. There was a grim silence among the boys, but the majority of them felt very bad. They wanted to laugh and dance, if only to express their feelings.

"That will do," said Miss Elegantine. "Now, miss, I daresay you will be able to give me a bed in this"—she looked about her with an expression of disgust—"this old prison?"

"Yes," said Eveline; "your nephew can bring up your box. There is a small room near mine you can have."

"I suppose," said Miss Elegantine, to the Spaniard who had brought up the box, "that you do not want any extra pay for so small a job as carrying this thing?"

He seemed to understand her, and by his actions expressed that he wanted nothing. Indeed, he exhibited a strong desire to get away without delay on any terms.

"Be off with you!" cried Miss Elegantine, shaking her sunshade at him. "And the next time you bring a lady over the sea, mind you are able to speak a decent language she can understand. Oh, you parrot!"

The man, feeling he was dismissed, vanished forthwith, and Eveline led her visitor into the hall and up the dark staircase to the chambers above.

The only place available for Miss Elegantine Dibble was a small room—that was like a slice off a big square chimney with a slit in the side. There was a

bedstead in it, and Eveline said she would get her some bedding soon.

Dibble put down the box, and quietly "evaporated" from the room. Miss Elegantine sat down upon the bedstead and sighed.

"It is very like prison?" she said.

"The rooms are gloomy," admitted Eveline, "but we may be able to brighten them by-and-by—if we remain. But papa is in trouble. Those foolish Spaniards think he is conspiring to take Spain."

"All the jabbering idiots appear to me to be daft," said Miss Elegantine. "Although I must make one exception. The gentleman who showed me such peculiarly marked attention seems to me to be a superior specimen of the breed."

Eveline made no reply. Miss Elegantine took off her bonnet, disclosing a false front very much awry.

"If," she said, meditatively, "he proposes, as I am sure he will, I shall not refuse him. He is graceful, and I like his eyes. Besides," she added, archly, "it is our mission to make men happy."

Eveline could bear no more without screaming with laughter, and pleading a domestic duty that called her away, she left Miss Elegantine to herself.

CHAPTER CXIX.

THE TRIALS OF MR. FARRELL.—SENDING AWAY THE CUBS.

M R. FARRELL, in his prison, gave way to troublous thoughts. He had as companions two Spanish soldiers, who talked to each other in a language he did not understand, and when he spoke to them, they merely nodded their heads and grinned—an exasperating thing to bear.

To add to the misery of the schoolmaster, he was not visited either by his wife or daughter. The first day passed dearly enough alone. Even Chorker would have been welcome as a companion to kill the time.

As in like cases, the suspense—the lack of knowledge of the fate in store for him—added to his misery, and in the fashion of weak-minded people, he soon began to calculate the chances of his being helped by those who were stronger than himself.

Would Jim Gordon help him? That was the question. He was sure that if Jim put his mind to it, he would soon play the very deuce with Don Alguia Marbalo and his men.



"And I don't see why he should not," moaned the schoolmaster, as he sat upon his rude couch with his head between his hands. "I have not been unkind to the boys, *taking things all round*. Oh, dear! Why was I ever born?"

It was a query that few people knowing him well would have been able to answer.

His meditations were broken in upon by a sound of the door opening, and, looking up, he saw Don Alguia in the chamber. The Spaniard eyed the dolorous countenance of the schoolmaster with grim satisfaction.

"And you," he said, "are the man who seeks to wrest the crown of Spain from our Queen!"

"On my word—I'll take my oath, if you like," cried Mr. Farrell, "that such a thought never entered my head. Half the boys in my school are mere children."

"A blind," muttered Don Alguia; "besides, the full-grown lion begins life by being a cub. Now, I have been thinking over your position. It is a serious one."

"You—you—you don't say-a-ay so," stammered Mr. Farrell.

"I do," said the Don, "and so is that of your bigger boys. With regard to the smaller ones, I have a proposition to make to you. It is that they besent home without delay."

Mr. Farrell pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

"Certainly," he said; "but how is it to be done?"

"I will transport them to Gibraltar in my vessel the 'Guadalquivir,' replied the Don, "and from thence have them sent home. One of my officers will see to it. But you must provide the money, of course. Like all Englishmen, you have plenty."

"If you think it *must* be done——"

"I insist upon it. We Spaniards do not fight against little children. We cannot admit that they have conspired against the peace of the realm. Therefore they must go."

"The money," murmured the schoolmaster; "that is the difficulty——"

"If you do not produce it forthwith I will have you hanged outright. A poor Englishman is of no matter to his country."

"I have some notes sewn up in the li-ining of my coat," said Mr. Farrell.

"Out with them all, and let us go into figures as to cost of transport, food, my commission as your agent, and so on. Let me assist you."

The dismayed schoolmaster was feebly fumbling with his coat. The Don drew it off and coolly proceeded to rip up the lining. From under it he pulled forth notes for five hundred pounds.

"I reckon," said the Don, "that I can retain no

more than sixty of your boys. That leaves a hundred and forty to go. This is not enough money."

"There are cheap steamers," moaned Mr. Farrell—"luggage boats, that will take them for two pounds a head."

"Nonsense! The boys must be sent home in a proper manner and have something wherewith to get to their friends. You have more money about you. Let me explore."

He explored that worthy man to some purpose. Not only in the lining of his waistcoat, back and front, but about his trousers also, did he find bank-notes. By the time he had done exploring and ripping up, the schoolmaster was as ragged as a tramp and thrice as mournful in aspect.

"I think," said the Don, as he gathered up the notes, "that here will be about sufficient. If more is wanted you must give me a note of hand on the bankers of the Napoleon family in Paris."

"I can give you anything," moaned Mr. Farrell, "but I doubt if it will be worth the paper it is written on."

On the whole, the Don appeared to be very well satisfied, and, bidding Mr. Farrell a sarcastic adieu, mainly addressed to his spoiled apparel, he strode to the door. There he paused and fired at him a last shot in a cold-blooded way.

"You would be useful to your English friends now," he said, "for—what you call him—to frighten crows—pigeons, all birds—a sea—are-crow. Ha, ha!"

Then he vanished, and Mr. Farrell gave vent to his feelings in many unavailing groans and moans.

When the resolve of the Don became known, the school was stirred up like a hive of bees. But the smaller boys had had enough of turmoil and peril, and were rejoiced at the prospect of going home. As for the elders, the opinion was that it was a good step for all.

Jim and Morse, strolling up and down the front of the castle, expressed their views thus:

Said Jim: "It is the very thing we were talking about, and it is a jolly good job it has come to pass. The youngsters, when once they get to Gibraltar, will be all right. There will be a row among their friends at home, and some sort of stir made, I don't doubt."

"Which will end in smoke," said Morse. "None of their people will take any serious steps to bring Nap to book, and the authorities will not credit the story, and look upon the whole show as a farce. Perhaps a member of Parliament will be induced to mention it in the House, and then it will be passed on to the Foreign Secretary, who will communicate with the Spanish Ambassador, who will promise to investigate. Long before anything is done we shall all be transported away from here or killed, or had no end of

fun with these fellows. For my part I don't think the Don is up to serious business."

"Talks of thoroughly overhauling the castle," said Jim.

"In search of lucre," rejoined Morse. "Now comes a plain fact: my laboratory must be cleared out before he gets fooling about there, or he will blow the whole show over to Algiers. Jim, if you will give me a hand, it can be done to-night."

"I'm with you, of course," assented Jim. "What do you propose to do with the stuff?"

"Hide it away in the caverns, everything, and leave him nothing but an empty room. We can cover up the trapdoor with an old bit of carpet, and he will never suspect its existence."

Jim fell in with the entire arrangement, and then they went to look on in the courtyard, where the boys had been mustered and the Don was busy picking out those who were to take their departure on the following morning.

Miss Elegantine Dibble was there, keeping him close company, to his infinite and ill-restrained disgust. All the lady knew was that the boys were to be weeded out and some of them sent home, and among them she was determined her nephew should not be.

But she need not have been anxious. Dibble was rather ready to go, but he was not among the chosen ones.

The Don knew nothing of names, and he simply sorted the boys into two groups, big and little.

There were some pretty close selections, but none whose names have appeared in our story were selected to depart. There were sixty of the sturdiest left for the purpose the Don had in his mind, which was to finally take them to Minorca, where the highly-intelligent governor, Don Carlos Spartola, would be left to do as he pleased with them.

It was the third day of the residence of Don Alguia on the island, and since that stroll down to the beach, Eveline and Mrs. Farrell had studiously held aloof from him. But in their place he had the charming Miss Elegantine for company, and he was unable to entirely dodge her, although he tried his best to avoid her.

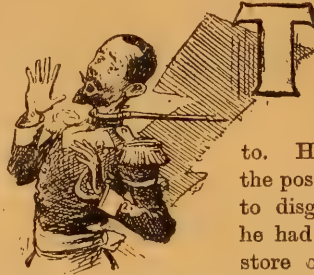
The boys selected to depart were sent into the castle to their get small belongings together, and the retained sixty were told they could go out where they pleased "on parole."

Jim Gordon passed word for them to foregather as soon as they could, without attracting special attention, in the wood at the back of the castle, for a general consultation on the position.

Quietly they melted away, and the Don was left moodily pacing to and fro with Miss Elegantine leaning on the staff of her sunshade, and gazing at him with an air of sentimental pity.

CHAPTER CXX.

MISS ELEGANTINE RETURNS SHOCK FOR SHOCK.—
JIM'S PLANS.



THE moodiness of the Don arose from a cause very different from what Miss Elegantine attributed it to. He was thinking about the possibility of being obliged to disgorge a sum of money he had laid aside from the store of Mr. Farrell as percentage. He knew the disposition of his governor at Minorca well enough to know that, if he heard of the affair, he would insist upon having it, and the question was, How would he be able to keep a hold of a certain surplus of the money requisitioned from the schoolmaster?

Miss Elegantine thought he was suffering from a doubt of having his love requited, and, moved by pity, she resolved to put his mind at ease.

"Ahem!" she coughed.

The Don took no notice of her, but continued to stroll to and fro, musing, half-aloud:

"It must be concealed from him. Carlos Spartola, when I take my treasure to Minorca, will covet it."

A thrill of delight passed through Miss Elegantine's bony form. Next to being loved, there is no joy so dear to woman's heart as the being able to excite jealousy.

"Confound him!" said the Don, raising his eyes to the clouds. "I must swear all who know of it to secrecy."

"Ahem!" coughed Miss Elegantine a second time.

As before, he continued oblivious of her, and she, attributing it to bashfulness, stole up behind him and playfully put the crook of her sunshade round his neck.

"Ketchee, ketchee," she said, as if playing with a kitten.

The Don was staggered, and not being endowed with more than his share of real pluck, at first gave way to mortal fear. He thought a noose had been put around his neck, and it made him think of the Spanish *garrote*—the form of public execution in his country—and as he had witnessed it more than once, the memory was decidedly unpleasant.

"Ketchee, ketchee," sniggered Miss Elegantine again.

"Mercy!" he gasped, and dropped to the flagstones in a sitting position.

"It's only me—your Elly," said Miss Elegantine,

with childish glee, as she stooped down and peered tenderly into his face.

He uttered one swear—a wicked word in Spanish for which we have no full equivalent in our tongue, and therefore it will not be translated—then he got upon his feet and surveyed her like an outraged King of Spain.

"In the name of all that is infernal and villainous!" he hissed, "what are you doing?"

"Ketchee," she said for the third time, giving him a playful dig in the ribs with the crook.

In a black fury he drew his sword and slashed at it. But for her swiftly drawing the sunshade back, he would have made two portions of it.

"Hallo!" she exclaimed. "If you show your nasty tempers to me, I'll have nothing to do with you!"

"Go and hang yourself!" he roared. "Throw yourself off the ramparts! Get somebody to boil you alive!"

"Hoity-toity!" she cried, with a sudden stiffening of the back. "You give yourself airs, you do! If I did not think you loved me——"

The Don exploded. Not alone in voice or action, but in both. Every fibre of his body, and every hair of his head seemed to take a share in the short, sharp, bitter anathema he hurled at her.

"Away," he yelled, "out of my sight! Torments lay hold of you! Furies seize you! Away—*hag, cat, fossil!*"

Waving his arms violently, he strode across the courtyard, making for the outer gate.

"Hell," says Byron, "hath no fury like a woman scorned." Miss Elegantine was scorned, and being a bit of a fury on the slightest provocation, the scorn of the Don developed her into something passing the ordinary strength of angry woman.

She was in a manner of speaking about forty over-proof in the matter of spirit, and with a screech that was worthy of an owl caught in a trap, she dashed after him.

Dexterously as a Thug in full practice, she got the fatal crook around his throat, jerked him back, and then dropping the sunshade, went to work with both hands upon his head and face.

His hat flew up in the air, and tufts of hair began to fly about like fluff. She scored his face with her nails as if her hands had been patent paper-rulers.

Finally she got him down, jumped once upon him, and flopped upon her back, screaming:

"Murder! Fire! Thieves!"

Confused as he was by this onslaught, he had one definite idea left, and that was, he ought to get away with the least possible delay. Accordingly he scrambled up and vanished with the celerity of a sprite.

The moment he was gone Miss Elegantine left off

screaming and got upon her feet. Apparently nobody had heard her, and she was alone.

"I'll teach him to trifle with my feelings, the wretch!" she exclaimed, as she settled her false front. "The Spanish—Spanish—*onion!*"

Having relieved her feelings thus, she stalked into the castle.

Meanwhile the boys had assembled in the wood at a comparatively open spot near where the men of Reonardo had been shot down. Their graves were still there as the friends of the fallen men had left them.

Jim Gordon stood erect, facing a triple semicircle of eager faces. Morse and the other members of the council sat, by virtue of their authoritative position, in front.

We come upon them at a time when Jim had explained his views about the Don's pluck, already conveyed to Morse.

"I don't believe," he said, "that among the whole lot there is one ounce of real fight. But they have arms, and a shot from a gun held straight by a fool, is just as good as if the wisest man in the world fixed it."

Murmurs in assent of this truism passed through the group. Jim went on:

"Up to the present moment," he said, "our rifles have not been removed from the castle. All that is left of our ammunition Morse has in the laboratory. It will be put away, with other things, to-night. Now, in my opinion, all we have to do is to shut out the Don and his men, tell them to go back, and there will be an end of them."

"But half the men sleep in the castle every night," suggested Terry.

"Yes, but we must devise some means of getting them out of it. There are two men on guard over Mr. Farrell also. But I fancy we can do as we like with them. All I want to know is, are you all prepared to stand by Morse and myself if we attempt this thing?"

There was a pretty general response in the affirmative, but to Jim's ear there appeared to be a few laggards.

"I am sure," he added, "that unless we stand up against this emissary from the governor of Minorca we shall eventually be conveyed away to a prison, and once there, goodness knows what will become of us. It cannot be done until the 'Guadalquivir' has taken the youngsters to Gibraltar and returned. I must confess that their going will be a load off my mind."

"We are with you, Jim," they cried, as with one voice.

"Good," he said; "then we need no longer confer. Scatter and amuse yourselves as you please, but do

not wander anywhere singly. I am not certain that we have heard the last of the wild man. *Verb. sap.*"

"Which means," explained Terry, as he got upon his feet, "that a nod to a blind horse is as good as a wink."

The conference broke up, and the boys went off in parties in various directions to spend the afternoon as profitably and pleasurably as possible.

The sense of relief felt by Jim at the prospective departure of the small boys was on all the elder ones.

"You see," said Terry to Rainstone, "it gives us a free hand, and if ever we should be besieged again in the castle, the provisions would last three times as long."

"Besieged in the castle!" exclaimed Rainstone. "Surely never again?"

"You can never tell your luck—till you've got it," sententiously answered Terry.

It was an hour before sundown when the little host of small boys paraded for departure. Each and all had shaken hands and bidden farewell to those they were leaving behind them.

It had not been done without a dim eye here and there, and a lumpy feeling in the throat. But all could see that it was wisest and best that it should be so. Into the question of the motives of the Don, none entered. There was no time for speculation.

The school band belonged to the sixty that were to remain, but the members of it determined to lead the way to the beach where the small boys were to embark. Indeed, all the school resolved to be there, and Don Alguia did not show up to remonstrate. The work of marshalling the boys down to the shore and embarking to the ship he left to a subordinate.

To the stirring music of fife and drum the procession descended to the seashore, where they found Mrs. Farrell and Eveline waiting to wave them a last adieu. Miss Elegantine was "keeping her room with a headache."

The boats were ready, and with all speed the boys were borne away, cheering as they went, some with choky voices.

The band played until the last lot had embarked, and the gathering on the beach sent up a ringing parting cheer.

Jim crossed over to Eveline.

"I am glad they are gone," he said, "and wish it were safe to send you with them."

"I would not go," said Eveline, quietly.

Mrs. Farrell turned to Jim, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief.

"I hope," she said, "they will all reach home safely?"

"Oh," said Jim, encouragingly, "there is no fear of that."

"I should never forgive myself if anything happened to one of them," she said.

It was getting dark, and as they moved back to the castle, in the rear of the main body of boys, the Don suddenly appeared before them. He had his face muffled in a handkerchief.

"I remain," he said, thickly, "with fifteen of my men. We must for the time be your guests, fair lady."

A stiff bow was the sole reply.

"I have a question to ask," continued the Don, "it is of the big, long senorita—she of the umbrella—she is not with you?"

"Miss Dibble is keeping her room," said Mrs. Farrell. "She is not well."

"Very ill—dying perhaps?" eagerly queried the Don.

"She is ill—that is all I know."

"I, too, am unwell," said the Don, pathetically. "Roaming on yonder cliff, I slipped and fell among brambles. Behold!"

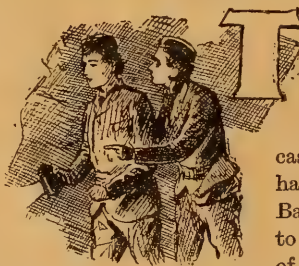
He drew aside the handkerchief from his face. She glanced at the scratches, and smiled.

"The brambles," she said, "have done their work in parallel lines. One might think it was done with finger-nails."

Don Alguia said something within himself, and fell into the rear. A dozen steps behind the rest he gloomily followed them to the castle, at intervals glancing malevolently at Jim and Eveline, who walked very close together, talking in whispers.

CHAPTER CXXI.

THE MIDNIGHT STORAGE.—DON ALGUA MAKES A SNEEZING EXHIBITION OF HIMSELF.



HERE being ample room now for Don Alguia Marbalo and his men, they slept that night in the castle, retiring early, having nothing to do. Barely had they retired to the chambers, a portion of those recently oc-

cupied by the younger boys, when Jim and Morse appeared in the great hall. The latter had a dark-lantern in his hand.

Hitherto the door of his laboratory had been kept locked. Don Alguia, under the belief that it was simply a store or lumber-room, had shown no disposition to enter it. On the morrow it might be different, for on that day he had made up his mind to overhaul the entire castle. He had a peculiar object in this, as we shall see ere this chapter is concluded.

Morse opened the door, and lighted two lamps

inside. Taking it in his hand, he raised the trap-door, and descended.

"I am only going to the bottom of the flight," he said, "to place it there. My idea is just to pop the things down below, and while I am gone you may start bringing in the rifles."

These weapons were stored in one of the passages near the kitchen, being simply stood against the walls in regular order. Jim took a second lamp with him to this place, and began his work. He had brought two armfuls of rifles and laid them on the floor of the laboratory ere Morse returned.

"Go on with that work, Jim," he said, "as there are many things I would rather carry down myself. A slip might create a disturbance, and I am better acquainted with the peculiarity of the steps."

Jim knew he did not make this proposition without there being a sound reason for it, and resumed his especial work. By the time he had conveyed all the rifles to the laboratory Morse had practically cleared the place.

"There is this old jar," he said, with one of his dry smiles, "which I will leave for the benefit of that blessed Don. It has a very agreeable smell, Jim, but don't you be induced to sniff it."

Jim said he wasn't curious, and no great lover of scents, and, with his companion, began the transporting of the weapons below. They were stacked at the foot of the stairs, and by one in the morning the work was done.

Morse had a piece of old carpet ready, which he placed over the trap-door, and the table upon it. Unless a person was suspicious, he would not think of a trap-door being there.

"A good thing well done," said Morse, as he locked the laboratory door.

Ten minutes later they were in bed and sound asleep.

In addition to the boys, the men had also been retained. It was supposed that Chorker had made an attempt to get taken away and had failed. He had no money wherewith to pay his passage.

He was being continually worried by the two under-masters about the property he had obtained from them for food under most discreditable circumstances, and all his assurances that he knew nothing about where it was they flatly refused to credit.

He was in the happy position of not having a friend in the place. Not even the Spanish soldiers would have anything to do with him.

As for the trio of niggers, they kept as much out of the sight of Don Alguia as possible, having a notion that Spain still dealt in slaves, and that he might take it into his head to carry them off for sale.

"And suppose he did it?" remarked Romeo on one occasion when they were discussing the matter in the

kitchen. "It break my heart to tink what a miserable price you two ole niggers fetch."

This raised a rumpus on the question of their relative market-values, which ended in a rolling-pin being thrown at Romeo's head, and a water-jug on the dresser was broken.

In the morning, with a strangely-thinned company in appearance, the sixty elder boys sat down to breakfast, favoured with the company of the Don. His men partook of the meal in the courtyard, bivouac fashion.

The Don sat silent and haughty at the table, endeavouring now and then to stop the chatter of the boys with a look. He had been doing something to his face that in a measure hid the handiwork of *Mis^s Elegantine*, and as he sat in shadow, or as much as he could get, his injuries were scarcely noticed.

Immediately after breakfast he called in a file of men, and announced that he was about to search the castle through. He did not say what for, and nobody seemed at all interested in his going.

"I will take this room first," he said, pointing towards the laboratory door. "Who has the key?"

Morse handed it out, saying quietly that there was nothing beyond a lot of old rubbish in the room.

"We shall see," said the Don, significantly.

He passed the key to one of the men, and by a sign bade him unlock the door. It was soon done, and the trio entered.

There was nothing but a few odds and ends of rubbish and a jar or two; but Don Alguia, in pursuance of his intention, proceeded to thoroughly investigate the room.

One of the men with him took up the jar that Morse had shown to Jim the previous night and sniffed it. An expression of pleasure crossed his features.

There were watchful eyes from the hall, the "tip" of something coming having been passed round.

The second man, too, sniffed, and was caught by his officer in the act.

"Dog!" cried the Don, "what have you there?"

"An agreeable perfume," replied the man.

The Don crossed the room, took a sniff, and yet another. He smiled, and regaled himself with a third.

"It is delicious!" he said.

Then, without an instant's notice, he gave vent to a terrific sneeze.

This set the two men off, and they sneezed likewise.

"A very fair start," whispered Morse. "Now watch them."

It was worth watching, for the way they sneezed and capered about was unlike anything they had ever seen before. The boys screamed with laughter.

The trio danced and threw up their arms, giving vent to the most violent of nasal sounds. They leapt, rolled, and collided against each other, and before an

expostulation or an oath could be uttered they were at it again.

At length the power of the powder, whatever it was, caused them to sink exhausted upon the floor, where, after a few final small explosions, they were at peace, but limp as white herrings from their exertions.

The Don glared through the doorway at the hall, where he had recently seen the boys, but it was empty, and they were gone outside to have a finishing roar out of hearing.

"Diablo!" muttered the Don, "but this is a trick. I will be sorely avenged."

He got up, confounded his men, who responded with a final feeble sneeze, and strutted out.

"Methinks," he murmured, "that I will reserve the rest of inspection of the castle in search for gold for a more fitting time."

He was conscious of the place being, in more senses than one, rather a warm corner for him.

Miss Elegantine had inspired him with a wholesome fear of her bony fingers and nails, and he judged by "the sneezing-trap" set for him that he might look for hostilities from the boys.

As soon as the "Guadalquivir" returned he would ship the lot to Minorca, and leave the governor to settle with them.

But suppose the boys resisted? What if they ran like little pigs all over the island, how would he be able to get them in?

It was more than likely they would give him all the trouble they could. He was prepared for some signs of rebellion in them, but on sauntering outside was agreeably surprised to find them quietly lounging about. Moreover, they saluted him respectfully as he passed, and he, being a true-born Spaniard, responded graciously.

Jim had a conference with Martin later on, and he in turn had something to say to the men, leaving out Chorker, because he could not be trusted.

That night the castle was to be closed against Don Algua and his men.

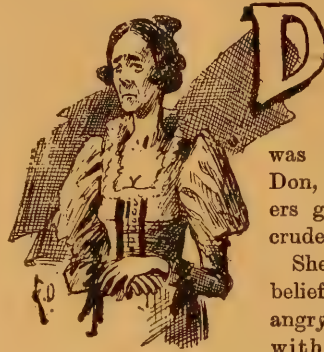
It was not that he was so much feared that it was to be done. There might be no real mischief in the man, but his presence there could not fail to be embarrassing.

A monkey in a china shop would enjoy himself exceedingly, and afford some amusement to those who had no interest in its contents, but to the seriously-minded owner he would be a nuisance. Therefore was the Don to be kept out of the castle.

And as to the method, and the way it was to be worked, that must be shown in the next chapter.

CHAPTER CXXII.

THE SECOND CLOSING OF THE CASTLE GATES.



DURING the rest of the day Miss Elegantine kept her room. With all her native ferocity she was rather afraid of the Don, her ideas of foreigners generally being rather crude.

She had an indefinite belief that when they were angry they stabbed people with long knives or daggers, and when extremely provoked roasted and ate their foes. Therefore she deemed it advisable to hold aloof from the Don, for a time at least, and conjured up a convenient headache, so that she could keep her room.

The Don on his part was no less pleased at her absence, and during the latter part of the afternoon utilised the time in writing a letter, which he commissioned Romeo to carry to Eveline.

Now Romeo was, as some of our readers may have discovered, not an absolute fool. In some matters he was a decided improvement on his progenitors. He was suspicious of the contents of this letter, and instead of taking it to Eveline, he put it into his pocket to give to Jim.

Jim at that time was absent, as indeed all the boys were, but later on, the hour of tea having arrived, they came trooping in.

Romeo, while moving around, got an opportunity to speak to Jim in a whisper.

"Got a letter for you, Massa Gordon," he said.

"Whom from?" asked Jim, quickly.

Romeo nodded towards the Don, who with a lofty air was seating himself at the head of the table.

"From him to me?" exclaimed Jim.

"Not to you," said Romeo, putting his mouth to Jim's ear, "but for Missy Ebbyline."

"How came you by it?"

"He gave it to dis chile to deliber. But me see him made into jam fust."

The grin on Romeo's face explained the position. Jim bade him hand over the letter, keeping his eyes on the Don as he received it.

Now Jim hitherto had not seated himself nearer to the Don than he could help, but on this occasion he went to the upper end of the table, and sat down on his right. Morse faced him on the Don's left.

It was not to be supposed that the Don would

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"Oh, Jim, is this dreadful news true?" she asked, as she clasped his arm.

condescend to talk to them, or indeed to any at the table. But they were not inclined to be themselves silent on that account.

"Another ship in the bay," said Jim, in a casual sort of way. "Rather curious, wasn't it?"

The Don pricked up his ears, but asked no questions. Morse, after taking a deliberate bite out of his bread-and-butter, said:

"Well, it was odd, especially as they *did* seem to know where they had landed. Fine old man that with the white beard. What question did he put to you?"

"He asked me where the old schoolhouse was, and I pointed out the way to go to the ruins of it."

"Stay!" said the Don, with a flushed face. "Before you proceed, let me ask a question. Was the ship you mention an old-fashioned Spanish galleon?"

"It was old-fashioned," replied Jim, after a short deliberation with himself, "but I do not know the build of a galleon."

"The gentleman you name—was he tall, with a slight stoop?"

Jim nodded.

"And the bay you spoke of?"

"Silver Bay. A mile or more from where the school used to stand."

"Did this gentleman make any further remark?"

"He said something about intelligence from the Spanish Government, and the landing of more troops on the island. He spoke of Minorca, too."

"It is Don Carlos Spartola, Governor of Minorca. How long was this ago?"

"Two hours."

"And he is not here yet?"

"Well," said Jim, "I suppose he has not been informed that the school has shifted ground, and finding nothing but ruins, he may be in a bit of a fix."

"I am lost—undone!" cried Don Alguia. "What will he say to me for not keeping a lookout? To arms, all you men in the courtyard. I must hasten to find the Don Carlos Spartola, and greet him with fitting martial honours. Stir yourselves, you *fools*!"

He leaped up from his seat, seized his hat, and having hastily formed his men into order marched away.

"Act the first," said Jim, "has succeeded to perfection."

He looked down the table to where Martin was sitting, and the blacksmith quietly slipped out and closed the castle gates. On returning he exchanged a few words with Jim ere he resumed his seat.

"After tea will do," said Jim. "It is dark now, and he won't be able to see whether there is a ship or not in the bay, if he goes so far. The probabilities are that he will go rummaging about the shore in search of the governor who is still in Minorca."

They laughed, and by this time there was much merriment at the expense of the departed Don and his men. Mr. Storeby, who with his companion undermaster had been "lying low" for some time, now assumed the authoritative, and demanded silence.

"I beg your pardon," said Jim, "what did you say?"

"I insist upon silence," was the reply.

"It isn't necessary under the circumstances," said Jim, unmoved.

A very ugly look crossed the face of the undermaster, but he said no more just then. With an effort he bottled his wrath, but he determined to get even with Jim one day.

As soon as the tea was finished Martin and the other trade teachers, excepting Chorker, went into the laboratory with Morse, and presently returned, each with a rifle in his hand.

Nobody else had left the hall, and again the mind of Mr. Storeby was exercised to make inquiry.

"Why are you armed?" he demanded. "I thought that foolery was done with?"

"Not quite," replied Martin.

"Put that thing down!" cried Mr. Storeby, laying a hand upon the barrel of the weapon.

"Mind," warningly returned the blacksmith; "it is loaded, and may go off."

"It is a preposterous proceeding," said Mr. Storeby.

"What do you say, Turner?"

"Nothing," was the weary reply. "Let them do as they like."

"I must, I suppose," muttered Storeby. But he made another notch in his memory of something to avenge.

Accompanied by Jim, in addition to Morse, the men went up to the room where Mr. Farrell was under surveillance. The door was not kept fast, and opening it, they entered.

The two guards were seated on the bed playing cards. Mr. Farrell gloomily paced the floor.

"Stand, you two Spanish chaps," cried Martin.

"Get their rifles, boys."

The Spaniards saw that they were in a fix, and by their terror-fixed faces showed that they feared the worst. Jim and Morse had already secured their rifles, which were leaning against the wall. They now relieved them of their bayonets also.

"Take them out, Martin," said Jim.

A signal from the blacksmith sufficed to start the pair, and with shaky knees they left the room, followed by all the men. Jim and Morse remained behind.

Mr. Farrell, who was still in his ragged clothes, had shown a desire to hide away under the bed, but he was recalled to himself by the voice of Jim, assuring him there was no danger.

"I am indifferent to it if there is," said Mr. Farrell, still on his hands and knees; "I am merely looking under the bed for something I have dropped."

This outrageous falsehood would have angered them or raised a laugh at another time. But now it only excited contempt.

"I merely wish to tell you, sir," said Jim, "that circumstances have compelled us to lock out Don Alga Marbalo and his men."

Mr. Farrell got up on his feet, and, with his arms folded on his chest, was almost himself again. He nodded approval.

"Out of this," continued Jim, "trouble may arise. But I won't be sure. What we ask for is a free hand to do as we please."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Farrell, tartly, "that—you are sure the Don has departed with his men?"

"They have all gone," replied Jim; "the last two, who have been looking after you, have, I reckon, by this time, been put out of the gate."

"Indeed! Well, Gordon—as to future trouble, I request you to make none of it."

"It will not be of our making, sir. All we have to do is to show a bold front, and the chances are that the Don will depart when his ship returns from Gibraltar."

"Suppose it never returns, Gordon?"

"In that case we shall have to keep the Don and his men aloof."

"I think," said Mr. Farrell, with the cold, cutting air of the great original Napoleon, "that you are taking false steps. You are always taking them, and the result is nothing but muddle, turmoil, and peril. I was making arrangements with the Don, I—I—"

He saw the boys looking at his torn clothes, and pulled up short, finally taking refuge, like the weak man he was, in unreasonable anger.

"You set a bad example, Gordon," he cried; "your conduct is infamous!"

"You have said as much before," returned Jim, "and of course I cannot answer you as I would if I were a grown man. As you are free now, Mr. Farrell, I think it will be better if you change your clothes. I won't ask who has treated you so infamously, or why it was done."

"If you did," said Mr. Farrell, "I would not tell you."

And then, with all the hauteur of the entire Bonaparte family concentrated in his bearing, he stalked from the room.

"An incurable fool," said Jim. "Well, Morse, so far we win. Now we have to learn if I have rightly estimated the character of the Don."

On going down below they were told that the two soldiers had been quietly marched outside by the scruff of the neck, and the gates closed against

them. In the hall the sixty boys were capering about as pleased as school pupils on the eve of going home for a holiday.

"We are good for a month's siege," said Terry; "longer, if we are careful with the grub."

"As you will have to be," replied Jim, gravely. "I wish to be hopeful, but one can never tell what is going to happen."

With the gates closed and the portcullis down, they were safe from intrusion on the part of the Don, who had no means of carrying the place by assault, even if he were so minded. But for all that, Jim and Morse made up their minds to keep watch all night.

It would be cold, and Martin suggested that they should have a number of rugs to lie upon in the warmest corner of the covered way near the gates. This was accepted as a reasonable proposition, and at nine o'clock the two chums went to their post, and the others retired to bed.

As an additional companion they had Charley, the bear, which, when they lay down, considerably took up a position that shielded them from draught, and gave them a lot of additional warmth.

"Seen anything of Eveline?" asked Morse, as he rolled himself up in a rug.

"Just for a moment," answered Jim. "I explained matters, and she said she was quite easy in her mind. She tells me that the Don took all Nap's money to pay the home passage for the little kids. Nap had it concealed in his clothing, and now we know why he was reduced to rags."

"I don't care," said Morse, sleepily; "the Don can have his money."

"So say I," answered Jim. "Good night."

They were soon soundly asleep, and it seemed to Jim, who was generally a dreamless sleeper, that the next minute somebody was knocking at the gate. He sat up and laid a hand on Charley, who was uttering soft growls. Outside there was a sound of shifting footsteps, and the voice of the Don was heard.

"They are all asleep," he said; "but on the morrow I will awaken some of them. It was a sorry prank to play us. There is no ship in the bay, and of course no governor. I wish I had thought of going thither first, instead of prancing about the island in search of his excellency."

Murmurs assenting to this view of the subject were heard, and the Don went on:

"Diablo! but it is cold! The small hours of the morning are always chilly. What can we do? Ten times have I knocked, and there is no answer."

"We must camp outside, senior," said one of the men.

"Fiends seize them!" hissed the Don. "I will try the door once more."

Jim gave Charley a signal by touching him on the shoulder, and the intelligent beast sprang growling at the door.

The Don heard the sound, and knocked no more.

"To-morrow, men," he said, hastily, "you will shoot that brute. I like him not."

Then they were heard to go away, and Jim, laughing quietly to himself, lay down again and instantly slept.

CHAPTER CXXIII.

THE DON DEFIED.—A BRIEF SPLUTTER, AND THEN
A RUN.



ASTIR early in the morning, Jim and Morse betook themselves to the ramparts. Charley, who had no great liking for stairs, went off to the kitchen, to see if there were any odd pieces of food to be obtained.

A survey of the ground below revealed the camp of the Don and his followers. With some of the charred timbers of the schoolhouse they had made fires, and passed as comfortable a night as circumstances permitted.

"I have an idea," said Jim. "Suppose we get Betsy and Bella up here, and load them with peas for shot. There is a sackful in the store-room. As soon as we get these fellows near enough, we might let fly into the brown of them. It would clear them out sharp."

"A good idea," said Morse.

Below they found Terry, Rainstone, and others, and with their help the guns were got upon the ramparts, and propped up against two of the embrasures, so that they could be sufficiently depressed to fire down the path. They were both loaded, and the command given not to show as much as the tip of one of their noses.

It was considered that the Spaniards would most likely, with an eye to breakfast, pay an early visit to the castle. Men who have had nothing the better part of the previous day, are invariably ready for their breakfast.

So it transpired. The watchers on the ramparts had not long to wait. The Spaniards, conscious of no danger, came along talking about the way they would punish "the little villains" for shutting them out. The Don marched at the head of them with much the

same sort of feeling in his heart, but too dignified to give it utterance in the presence of his men.

Terry was offered the post of gunner to Bella, but he declined, so Jim took it, and Rainstone was allowed to take charge of the other gun. The main body of youngsters crouched behind the walls. Morse kept stealthy watch, and, when the moment came, gave the signal to fire.

The moment the two guns belched forth their fire every head was over the wall to see the result. Half a dozen of the Spaniards were capering about, rubbing their hands together, and holding their faces, in some cases, between their hands, and all shouting their loudest.

The Don had vanished with those who had fled at the sound of the guns, and the rattle of retreating feet sounded clearly above the cries of pain of the "wounded."

"They are not much hurt," said Jim, contemptuously. "But I know peas sting."

"We may go to breakfast, I suppose?" said Morse.

"Certainly," replied Jim, laughing. "They won't trouble us any more—not for some hours, anyway."

Coming so soon after the first siege of the castle, this affair was most comical, although, as it subsequently proved, there was a serious side to it.

It was not until after breakfast that morning that Jim remembered the letter Romeo had given him on the previous evening. After he had placed it in his pocket it slipped his memory entirely.

Taking advantage of his being comparatively alone in the courtyard, he opened it as "a spoil of war," and read the following precious effusion:

"LOVELY SENORITA,—Thou, whose eyes are as the stars of a summer's night, must have perceived my admiration, my devotion. That I love thee I swear by the sword I wear, never drawn yet save in the cause of honour, or for the protection of defenceless beauty.

"Surely your present rough, sordid surroundings are hateful to one so lovely, so ethereal. Come, then, with me, when the 'Guadalquivir' returns, to my home—a palace with every luxury the heart can sigh for—in Minorca. There by perfumed fountains I will sing to thee of love, and make thy life one long summer's day.

"Yours devotedly to the end,

"ALGUA MARBALO."

"What twaddle!" muttered Jim, contemptuously. "It is as well Eveline should never know it has been written."

So he tore it into a thousand fragments and cast them to the morning wind. By this simple disposition of the letter Eveline was spared the knowledge that in the dandified Don she had yet another and most unwelcome lover.

The firing of the two cannon had one good effect. It renewed in Mr. Farrell the old terror of warfare and subdued him. He talked no more just then of interfering with Jim's movements, and the resolute youth was the acknowledged master of the castle.

CHAPTER CXXIV.

THE DON MAKES A PETITION.—THE RETURN OF THE
"GUADALQUIVIR."



MATTERS were now entirely in harmony with the warlike feeling that for some time past had been gathering strength in the breasts of the elder boys. Like young cubs when they have once learnt the taste of blood, they longed for more of it.

Military discipline became the order of the day. Jim divided the boys into nine small companies, each under the command of one of the Council of Ten, while he became general of the whole.

Martin was appointed as keeper of the armoury and assistant maker of ammunition, Morse, as before, being the chief manufacturer. Sleery, Trueberry, Bastern, Waffle, and Changeling were told off as sentries to keep watch in turn upon the ramparts both day and night. Each watch was to be of two hours' duration, Sleery to be considered the captain of the watch.

Chorker, in consideration of his general incompetency and unfitness for work, found himself appointed as nigger's assistant in the kitchen, with the usual scullery work to do—washing-up, scrubbing floors, and blacking boots. Among other things, he had to do his share of clothes-washing.

He protested, but on being informed that in case of insubordination he would be put outside the castle gates, he yielded with the readiness of a man who of two evils was ready to put up with the least.

There was one person in the castle who looked on all these arrangements, made in a few hours, with unqualified amazement. That person was Miss Elegantine Dibble.

"If I had been told at home," she said to Mrs. Farrell, emphatically, "that there was a boy in the world who could have taken so much on himself, and carried it out, my hair would have stood up in alarm."

Considering that the hair she wore was not her own, this may be considered a remarkable admission.

There was no doubt that Jim, without being at loggerheads with her, had made himself respected and not a little feared. But in proportion to her admiration for him, so was her contempt of all the three masters proportionately increased.

Mr. Farrell she was not disposed to interfere with.

He was another woman's property. But Storeby and Turner she took in hand, and in a very few minutes bent them to her will.

As it was necessary for all now within the castle to do something, if only to keep themselves in health, she undertook the bed-making and general dormitory work.

"With those two nincompoops," she said to Mrs. Farrell, thereby referring to the two undermasters, "it won't be such heavy labour."

Turner yielded at once. Storeby made one faint, feeble struggle against the arrangement; it ended almost as soon as it began.

"I was engaged to teach," he said to Miss Elegantine, "and not to do housemaid's work."

"Sweep out all the rooms," she said, "and if it isn't done by tea-time, you get no tea."

"I haven't a broom," was his last feeble sputter of objection.

"Go into the kitchen," was the curt reply, "and the niggers will give you one."

Her manner left no more to be said, and, grinding his teeth, the undermaster went away and was soon busy.

It was well he did his work as it ought to be done, for Miss Elegantine, just before tea-time, went upstairs and inspected the rooms.

"It isn't so badly done," she said—"that is, for a man; but next time you will please go deeper into the corners."

"I suppose I can have my tea?" sullenly asked Storeby.

"Yes. Wash your face and hands first, before you come to table."

It was arranged—and Mrs. Farrell had something to do with the arrangement—that they should all take their meals together, and the first time they sat down Jim showed he could be sensible as well as firm.

He did not attempt to take any other seat than that which he originally occupied. Mr. Farrell, finding the top of the table vacant—Mrs. Farrell sat at the bottom—stared at it before sitting down.

"I suppose I am not taking a liberty, Gordon?" he said, dryly.

"Assuredly not, sir," replied Jim, gravely. "If ever we should be free of annoyance from our enemies, I hope to fall back into my old position and you to resume yours. I have nothing to do with domestic matters, and, if it were not necessary now, should not dream of assuming any form of authority."

"Sensibly spoken," said Mrs. Farrell.

The schoolmaster said nothing, but there was a movement in his throat as if he were swallowing something that had not been properly masticated.

Thus was the new order of things, a temporary necessity, inaugurated.

On the following morning early, Changeling, on duty upon the ramparts, saw a piece of white rag coming up the castle-path. In a moment more he saw it was attached to a long rod, carefully peeled so as to be of the same colour as the rag. At the other end of the rod was Don Alguia Marbalo, cautiously advancing.

"Halt!" cried Changeling.

The Don pulled up sharply, and stared quickly about him, like a scared cat.

"Up here, on the ramparts!" shouted Changeling.

The Don lifted up his eyes and saw him. Doffing his hat hurriedly, he bowed low.

"Pardon, senor," he said, humbly. "Behold, I bring a flag of truce."

"And mighty purty it looks," replied Changeling, critically; "reminds me of the days when I went to Sunday-school treats. I used to carry my handkerchief like that, only it wasn't so white."

"A flag of truce," repeated the Don. "I come to implore assistance."

"What's the matter? Any of you hurt? Been cutting your fingers with your pocket-knives?"

"The senor is given to mirth. But it is a case of food. I and my fifteen men are starving."

"That's a bad job," said Changeling, not particularly moved. "But why don't you look for grub? There's shellfish on the shore, and taters in the garden, also fruit."

"Where is the garden, senor?"

"A mile or so yonder," said Changeling, waving his hand in the direction of the farm—"through the chine and straight on ahead."

"Senor, if we could but have a little more solid food and some wine——"

"Can't spare it," said Changeling; "we are a bit short ourselves. There's a vineyard on the other side, and our foreigners mostly live on fruit."

"It is a fable," said the Don, passionately; "we live as other people do."

"And being, in a manner of speaking, throwed away lonely on a seashore," said Changeling, airily, "you must do as other shipwrecked people do—the best you can."

"I am, then, denied. You will give me nothing?"

"The next time you come I will give you the heaviest portion of the inside of this 'ere barrel."

Changeling pointed his rifle at the Don, who ducked his head.

"It is cruel!" he cried, wildly; "it is not the act of a Christian."

"Do you call yourself a Christian?" demanded Changeling. "Now look here: jawing tires me. Are you going?"

He elevated the rifle again, and the Don turned and fled.

"The idea!" muttered Changeling; "as if we was agoing to feed him. Perhaps Mr. Gordon or some of them," he added, meditatively, "would have melted and given him something, but a foreigner is p'ison to me, and therefore he and his fifteen dolly soldiers have just got to forage for a living."

Changeling said nothing about this interview, and the straits of the Don, if suspected by Jim and others, were not really known to them. Changeling meant to do a simple act of justice, and thought he had done rather a clever thing; but in his simplicity he erred. The Don was malevolent, and never forgot nor forgave a real or fancied injury.

Over the events of the next few days we will pass with a few words. We will not even dwell upon the sufferings of the Don and his men, who, on a diet of coarse shellfish, baked potatoes, and grapes, were afflicted with internal ailments and reduced to a very weak condition.

In the castle things went on smoothly, but there was no school. Even Mrs. Farrell agreed that it ought to be temporarily abandoned.

Jim drilled the boys, using a book in the possession of Morse as a guide until they could perform simple manœuvres with ease, and would have satisfied a good-tempered drill-sergeant.

At last one day—it was towards the evening—the "Guadalquivir" was seen standing in on her return from Gibraltar.

The news was passed through the castle as if by telegraph, and there was a rush for the ramparts.

There all that was human assembled, and only Charley remained below, too lazy to climb the stairs, but no doubt exercising his gifted mind as to what all the commotion was about.

There was a favourable wind, and she arrived off the mouth of the lagoon, where she dropped anchor and sent a boat ashore.

Before it touched the sands the Don and his men had assembled. The majority of them were going through sundry contortions, holding their sides and doubling up as if in pain.

"Me know what de marrer wif dem," said Romeo. "Dey's got de cholic."

"Whar you manners?" demanded Macbeth. "You 'bout de biggest cuss dat eber deflected you unfortunet fader."

"Cholic," thought Changeling; "that comes o' livin' on big winkles and taters."

Overcome with mirth at the full success of his experiment on the Don and his men, he swelled until he was almost black in the face.

Fortunately every eye was on the scene below, and his suppressed merriment was not observed.

There was no shamming about the Spaniards. They had all suffered, and were suffering. Some were

assisted into the boat, which had to make a double journey to get them all aboard.

From their elevated position it was hardly possible to distinguish the Don from his followers. It was, moreover, getting dark ere they had left what may rightly be termed the inhospitable shores of the island.

Whatever the Don may have said did not lead to any demonstration from the vessel, for she soon hoisted sail and lumbered away like the clumsy, if picturesque, craft she was.

"Good-bye," cried Terry, kissing his hand, mockingly, by way of adieu.

"I hope it is good-bye, and not *au revoir*," said Jim.

The party melted away from the ramparts until only Jim, Morse, the Farrells, and Miss Elegantine were left behind.

"I trust," said the latter, "that all danger is over, and that we may now live as peaceable Christians."

"We shall not be safe yet," replied Jim.

"Lawks amercy! What is in your mind?"

"We must live as if *they were going to return*," said Jim.

"School," said Mr. Farrell, "must be resumed to-morrow."

"It cannot be," firmly replied Jim. "That we have a respite now, I admit, but we must take advantage of it, sir, for another purpose. There is the farm crop of potatoes to be dug and gathered in."

"That is Dawson's work."

"He has very few of his boys left. We must all help. It will be well, too, if we gather a good stock of winter vegetables, such as carrots, parsnips, and so on."

"They can be dug when wanted."

"No, sir; when wanted we may not be able to get at them. I have no wish to alarm you"—he glanced round at them generally—"but it will be as well to be prepared."

"Is there never to be rest and peace?" asked Mr. Farrell, with a wail.

"It may have come now," said Jim, "but in any case it will do no harm to get in the crops. There is the fruit, too—the melons, and the grapes, and other things. We can dry the grapes upon the ramparts. I was also thinking, sir, that some of us might look about and see what there is eatable that can be shot. There are wild boars in the wood."

"Who will dare to seek them?" asked Mr. Farrell.

"Leave it to me," said Jim; "a store of pig-meat will not be unacceptable. Now that the weather is cooler, it will bear salting down."

"The boy," said Miss Elegantine, staring about her, "has the head of—of—an army provisioner."

"You had better leave everything to Gordon," said Mrs. Farrell, taking her husband's arm. "Shall we go down?"

She led him away, and Morse, with the spirit of self-sacrifice strong upon him, gave his arm to Miss Elegantine.

She accepted it with giggling condescension.

"Wonderful boys!" she murmured; "almost like men, I declare."

Thus were Jim and Eveline left together, and they lingered a few moments behind the rest.

"Jim," said Eveline, "but for you we should all be killed or carried away slaves."

"I do not do everything," replied Jim.

"Of course you don't," said Eveline, a little impatiently, "nor did Wellington personally fight all the Frenchmen, but he directed the battles, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Jim, with a smile, "but I am not Wellington."

"You are of the material that gets made into Wellingtons, or Nelsons, so don't be stupid," returned Eveline; "but when I pay you a compliment, and mean it, be gracious enough to accept it."

"I will," answered Jim; "moreover, I am grateful, as I am for anything that comes from you."

"Very well, then," said Eveline; "now tell me, Jim, if you won't tell anyone else. What have we to look for now?"

"Will the Don return, do you mean?"

"I am not thinking of anyone in particular."

"The Don may not return," said Jim, "and he may. But I believe he will rouse up some feeling against us. Then there is Lucia di Valo."

"She!" said Eveline, with a curled lip.

"She can be dangerous," said Jim; "there is more of the tiger than the human being in her."

"But surely men cannot be led by such a woman?"

"Such men as she knows can be. But do not be anxious. What we have done before we can do again, and more."

Jim's face brightened as he made this assertion. They moved on to the head of the stairway.

"Do not come down," said Eveline, "I would rather go alone. That Miss Dibble is a prying creature."

"Good-night, then," said Jim.

"You will see me again," said Eveline, laughing.

"Good-bye for the present, then," said Jim, taking her hand.

He stooped and kissed her. She drew back with a laugh and vanished.

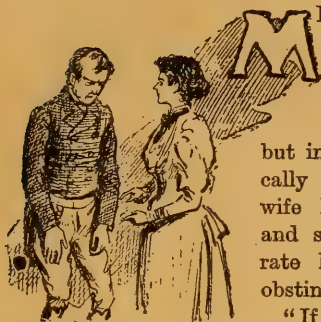
Jim remained on the ramparts for another quarter of an hour. As the light of day died away the "Guadalquivir" faded from sight. There was no doubt she was standing out for Minorca. The dim distrust he had of the Don contemplating a subterfuge was dispelled.

"There is no fight in him," murmured Jim, as he followed down the stairs; "he will not return, but—he may send others to do his dirty work. And then

—there is Lucia—more to be feared than all. She has threatened, and will not rest until she has struck a blow, or is dead.”

CHAPTER CXXV.

COMPLETING THE STORES OF THE CASTLE.—MISS ELEGANTINE HAS ANOTHER LOVER.



R. FARRELL might have his doubts about the necessity of storing the vegetables and fruit, but in that view he practically stood alone. In his wife he had no supporter, and she did not forget to rate him soundly for his obstinacy and stupidity.

“If you did anything yourself to meet the position, you might say something,” she told him, “but you do nothing of the sort. You grumble and cavil until trouble comes, and then you run away.”

It was a hard knock for him, but it served him right. It had the effect of keeping him silent.

One thing he would not do, and that was, assist in the work. “Jim, on his part, would not trust him in the castle without somebody to act with decision if he should show any of his tricks subversive to the general welfare.

He arranged that either he, or Morse, or Martin should always be at home, especially when the boys were away. Whoever was in charge of the castle, ten of the boys were to remain.

Romeo, too, might be counted on to act up to orders, and Jim gave him especial instructions to quietly keep his eye on Mr. Farrell’s movements.

The next morning the major portion of the boys and the men teachers went off potato-digging, taking with them the requisite tools—spades, forks, and sacks of medium size, in which to bring the produce home.

They took rations for the day with them, so as to lose no time, and by Jim’s directions half a dozen boys carried arms.

He remained in or near the castle all day, and was fortunate enough, when round by the back of the building, to come across a young grunter, lured there by the waste food Macbeth had thrown out of a window.

Jim, who had his rifle with him, shot the half-grown pig, a young boar, and found that it was in good con-

dition. He carried it back, and Mrs. Farrell directed Romeo to cut it up. Before the day was past it was salted down.

Miss Elegantine, having done her morning’s work, went out for a stroll. Jim, who saw her go, told her not to go far in case she lost herself. She had heard nothing of the wild man, and he did not name that mysterious personage, as he was not certain there was occasion, and did not wish to unnecessarily alarm her.

When Miss Elegantine came back to dinner, Jim was standing on the bridge, and the peculiar, elastic step of the old maid struck him as peculiar.

“You have had a pleasant walk, Miss Dibble?” he said.

“Very,” she replied, with a simper. “Most unexpectedly pleasant, and yet peculiar.”

“How’s that?” asked Jim.

“I cannot tell you at present,” answered Miss Elegantine, “because nothing definite—and yet—Oh! do not press me. It is all so peculiar—very, ahem!”

Jim saw no reason for pressing her, and asked for nothing more. She lingered a moment or two, as if not quite averse to another question or so, but Jim strolled down to the Roman Camp, and she tripped with a light and airy step into the castle.

When the party returned from the farm garden at eve, they brought with them fifteen small sacks of splendid potatoes, which were stored in one of the many odd rooms near the kitchen. It was more than a tenth of the crop, they said, and everything else was in splendid condition for digging.

“At this rate,” said Jim, “it will take ten days to get in the potatoes alone. I am doubtful if we have so much time at our command. But we shall see.”

On the third day the farm was left, and the vineyard visited, to gather melons and grapes, which were healthful to eat, although they did not come under the head of really solid food.

Macbeth knew how to preserve melons, and some of the less ripe were put aside to keep, while those that were fully ripe he said he would put up at once. Some were laid aside, too, for eating as they were at once.

After the fourth day, Jim held a Council of Ten, and the object of it was to make arrangements for the recalling of the digging party, if necessary, at a short notice.

He told them it was necessary to keep a sharp lookout in the direction of Minorca for any boats that might be approaching the island. They could easily be seen from the ramparts, and the recall must be given.

His plan was to have one of the guns loaded, and

fired as a signal. As it was doubtful if the sound could be heard either in the vineyard or on the farm, he appointed two of the boys to stand with loaded rifles, one at the entrance of the chine and the other half-way up it, when the farm work was going on. As soon as the gun sounded from the ramparts they were to fire in turn, and then the whole party were to hasten home.

"Do not stay to bring anything but your tools," said Jim, emphatically; "waste not a moment."

If at the vineyard, the sentries to carry on the signal were to be posted at given distances from the castle and each other.

"It may not be needed," said Jim, "but there is nothing like being prepared."

He knew that it was early times to be on the alert, but it was better to be several days too early than one day too late.

Every morning, since the work of storing began, Miss Elegantine had gone out, and on each occasion returned with a buoyant step. Her manner became painfully mysterious, and in the afternoon she sat by the castle-gate gazing pensively towards the woods on the other side of the path. But, as it happened, nobody sought her confidence, and she did not offer it.

On this morning Jim and three or four more were going into the wood pig-hunting, and Morse remained in charge. It was only the second time he had taken that duty, and he was not aware that Miss Elegantine had gone out daily.

He was mooning about with his mind fixed on some new invention, when that aged, but still juvenile, lady came tripping out with a light step and a seraphic smile upon her face.

"Good morning, Mr. Morse," she said.

"Good morning," replied Morse. "Where are you going to?"

"I was thinking of taking my daily stroll," she simpered.

"Have you been out every morning?" he inquired, surprised.

"Every morning since the digging began."

"And where do you go?"

"Into the wood, and I have such a pleasant time."

"You must not go any more," said Morse, decisively.

"And why not?" she loftily inquired.

"Because it is dangerous," said Morse, shortly.

"Indeed," said Miss Elegantine, smiling, "there is no danger for me. I shall be protected."

"By whom?" asked Morse.

"My lover," said Miss Elegantine, with a giggle and a skip.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

THE STORY OF A LOVER.—COMPLETING THE STORES.



NEVER in the whole course of his life had Morse been more dumbfounded than he was by this announcement. There was something so ridiculously girlish in the way it was made that he hardly knew

whether to laugh or to be angry with one whom he could only look upon as an old woman.

Then it flashed upon him that one of the men might have been making fun of her, and he merely echoed the words, "A lover," in a sort of is-it-so-really way.

"Yes, a lover," said Miss Elegantine; "a peculiar gentleman in some respects. But surely you must know him. He is a neighbour. I wonder you never mentioned him."

"We have no neighbours here," said Morse—"unless you refer to somebody living in the castle."

"I do not," replied Miss Elegantine, "nor am I aware of the exact address of his abode. He is, as I said, eccentric. He wears garments of leaves—over his ordinary clothes, I presume."

"By George!" thought Morse, "she means the Wild Man."

"I judge by his demeanour," continued Miss Elegantine, "that he has been for some time past a recluse—a hermit they would have called him in the old times. I met him a few days ago, and I must confess that at first his appearance startled me. But he was so very engaging—knelt before me, and used expressions— Well, there! I cannot tell you what he said."

"And you have seen him every morning since?" said the wondering Morse.

"I have."

"And does he continue his—his peculiar conduct?"

"He varies it by giving me fruit, and sometimes he dances before me. It is not ordinary dancing."

"So I should say," said Morse, with a groan.

"He turns about like a teetotum," said Miss Elegantine, "and then, standing on one leg, kisses his hand to me. There is something foreign about him."

"Well, Miss Dibble," said Morse, "I hope you will take my advice and not go near him again. That man is dangerous."

"Dangerous! Good gracious!"

"He is a wild man—mad. Already he has attempted to take the lives of two persons. We set a steel trap for him, and, although it was strong enough to hold a bullock, he smashed it up."

"I can hardly believe he is really vicious," simpered Elegantine. "Nobody could be more gentle than he was with *me*!"

"No doubt," said Morse, sharply; "but he is changeable. At any moment he may turn about and attempt to kill you. He carries a club, I believe?"

"He has a walking-stick, or what appears to me to be one of extra thickness. Oh, dear!" she sighed, "how untrustworthy all men are! Then you think I had better not go near him any more?"

"If you value your life."

"It is disappointing," she sighed again; "but I suppose you know the nature of the man, or you would not speak of him as you do."

Shaking her head and sighing like a maiden all forlorn, she returned to the castle, leaving Morse to reflect upon the follies of age as exhibited by an ancient single woman.

But it was a matter that was not likely to trouble him long, and his mind resumed its work of conceiving things that could be done with chemical compounds. It was the one great theme of Morse's thoughts.

He so far respected Miss Elegantine's love secret as to confine himself to mentioning it to Jim. Strange to say, they did not make a humorous theme of it, but discussed it seriously.

The Wild Man still alive! That was a serious thing, for, however tender he may have been to Miss Elegantine Dibble, he had hitherto shown himself the very reverse to such members of the other sex as he had come in contact with.

There was a possibility that his experience of the trap had acted as deterrent to violence by scaring him; but it would never do to trust to that. So more of the boys were armed, and none allowed to go out without at least one attendant carrying a loaded rifle.

"Shoot him on sight," was the order given. "Do not give him the chance of doing mischief."

The work of getting stores was hastened, and several tons of potatoes were eventually housed, with a quantity of carrots, turnips, and huge onions.

The quantity of grapes that was brought in would have stocked a small warehouse, and as the drying had been done in previous seasons, the boys were well up to the work.

Long rods were fixed across the ramparts and loaded with grapes, and the weather holding fine, the sun, though losing its power, was rapidly drying them. They were afterwards stored away in boxes to be used as required.

Finally the hunting in the woods was carried on by

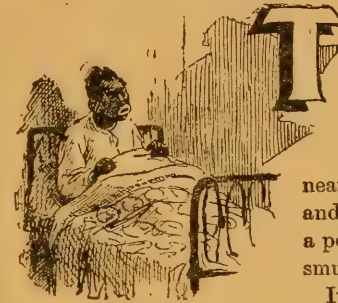
strong parties led by Morse or Jim; sometimes Martin went with them. In the end they got in a good store of pig-meat, which, having been salted, Sleery, the carpenter, rigged up a smoke-house in the courtyard, and turned the whole lot into the primeest bacon.

Thus a whole fortnight passed away, and they began to hope that the last of their enemies had been on the island.

The only trouble that was well to the fore was the mysterious individual whom they had dubbed the Wild Man. And all that concerned him was on the eve of being cleared up.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

THE WILD MAN COMES TO THE CASTLE. — A NIGHT SCENE.—THE LAST OF A MYSTERIOUS FOE.



THE trio of niggers slept in a room over the kitchen. It had a window looking out on the back of the castle, near the place where Jim and his friends took up a position to fire on the smugglers.

It was a big room, but warm, and it was the custom of the sleepers to leave the window open at night, although the chilly days were on them. It was the heat of the kitchen that made it close.

Macbeth had his bed immediately under the window. He selected this position, for, like all negroes, he had a horror of sleeping in the moonlight. When there was a moon, its light streamed through the window.

And no doubt they have good reason for regarding the practice with aversion, for the moon will distort the face of a sleeper, and leave it so for good and all.

It would have been better to put up a blind, but the window was so high, and the framework being of stone, it was a job they put off from day to day, until it was never done at all.

A night or two after the stores had been got in from the farm and fruit ground, Romeo lay abed thinking.

It was not often he indulged himself that way, but now and then, as on this occasion, the fit came over him.

What he had in his mind is of no moment to us. He went on thinking for half an hour, and then his thoughts were interrupted by a sound outside the window.

It was as if a big bird had flown against the stone wall and then dropped down, scraping the stones as it fell.

"What's dat?" muttered Romeo; "'pears sumfin' like a blind ole owl a-bangin' hisself agin de castle."

The sound was shortly after repeated, and it seemed this time as if the bird, or whatever it was, struck the wall immediately under and very close to the window.

"'Stornary ting dat," thought Romeo, and then he saw something rise just above the open window and lay hold of the sill. It was a hook or a huge claw.

"Now dis am 'bout de mose morfal ting dat me eber come across," muttered Romeo. "Gollysmash! dere someborry *climbing up de wall!*"

There was no mistaking the sounds that he heard—the quickly-drawn breath, the scraping of the feet against the stonework, the pause to get a firmer hold.

For a moment the blood of Romeo was chilled. But he was not a coward, and he had a rifle to hand in his room. To slip out of bed and put in a cartridge was the work of a few moments.

Then, shivering in his nightshirt, which was shorter than most people consider necessary, owing to shrinkage in the wash, and drawing back in the shadow, he waited.

Macbeth and Hamlet were sleeping like infants in one sense, although they occasionally gave vent to grunts and gasps that were strongly suggestive of the animals recently turned into bacon.

Romeo, between these sounds, heard the climber steadily coming up. The window was too high for him to get up to, or he would soon have settled the daring invader. All he could do was to wait, and shoot as soon as he showed his head.

He thought of waking the other sleepers, but reflected that they would probably make a noise and scare away the man, or men, who had the temerity to attempt a midnight visit to the castle.

"Berrer not do dat," muttered Romeo, "wifout dropping one ob dem."

So he waited in the gloom, taking aim at the window two or three times, so as to make a pretty sure shot of it when the moment came.

He was not a first-rate marksman yet, but was getting on, and the distance he had to fire was only a few feet.

What a time it seemed ere that expected face appeared?

Once there was so long a pause that Romeo thought the climber must have lost his hold and fallen. But he was only taking a longer rest than before, and came on gasping and muttering to himself.

One hand appeared, grasping the sill; then the other hand got hold. Last of all came the face, sur-

mounted with matted hair, and the features, being in the shade, but dimly visible.

The eyes alone shone like those of some nocturnal beast in the dark.

Romeo took steady aim and fired.

The hands let go, and the face disappeared. There was but a moment's pause ere the body struck the ground, but to Romeo it seemed an age.

There was no other sound but that of a thud upon the ground, no yelling of associates, no hurrying away of feet.

"He am alone," thought Romeo, "and he am done for."

The report of the rifle naturally woke up the two elder niggers, and both were so startled that neither could speak until Romeo advanced into the moonlight with the rifle in his hand.

"Now, in de name ob Ole Virginny 'bacca!" gasped Macbeth, "what you doin wif dat gun? For de law's sake, don't say dat you ben tryin' to shoot you 'fectionate granfader."

"Or you lubbin fader," groaned Hamlet.

They were terrified out of their wits. Of late Romeo had assumed such an independent attitude that they believed him capable of anything.

"You tank de stars dat you got a oppspring like me," said Romeo; "but for my lookin' afer you, it a dead sure ting you dis night hab been murdered in you beds."

"Done foolin', den," said Macbeth, sternly; "you too fond ob firin' dat popgun. What you mean by shootin' at de owls?"

"Owl yourself," said Romeo. "If you not tink I tell de trufe—"

"You couldn't do it," said Macbeth, curling himself up,

"Not if he had a goberment 'lowance for it," growled Hamlet.

The unbelieving pair curled themselves up to go to sleep, but the indignant Romeo was about to go at them again, and point out the hook as proof of his story, when, glancing at the window-sill, he saw that it was gone.

The man he had shot had probably torn it away as he fell, holding it in a convulsive grip of pain.

There were two ways to prove the story. One was to get up to the window and look down below where, no doubt, the fallen man would be seen, and the other to go outside and walk to the back of the castle.

The first was impracticable and the second distasteful, so Romeo put another cartridge into his weapon, laid it handy in case it should be wanted, and got into bed again.

Thanks to the thickness of the castle walls, there were no indications of his having disturbed the other inmates.

It was some time ere he could get to sleep, but the stillness outside remained unbroken, and he presently fell off, and heard nothing more until the voice of his grandfather aroused him in the morning.

His first thought was of the adventure of the night before, and it was in his mind to refer to it, but he elected to say nothing.

"Me jess take de ole fools roun' by-an'-by," he thought, "an' show dem dat it not a tale ob friction."

It was Chorker's duty to assist him the first thing in the morning, and he found him in the kitchen, laying the fire. Romeo was a little later than usual.

Romeo did not condescend to talk to Chorker, but it so happened that Jim Gordon, who was up early, came into the kitchen, and Romeo intimated that he would like to say a few words to him in private. They adjourned to the passage outside, and there the negro told his story.

"It is very strange," said Jim. "Load two rifles, and I will get Morse to go round with me."

"Me go too," said Romeo, who was bursting to see what it was he had brought to grief.

There could be no objection to it, but, prior to going thither, Jim ran up to the ramparts to see if there were signs of any foe about. But on neither land nor sea was there anything to cause apprehension. So he descended again, and the two chums, with Romeo, walked round to the back of the castle.

And there, lying upon his face, they saw the Wild Man. He was quite still, and there was every sign that he was dead.

Close by him was a rope made of twisted tendrils of some forest vines which in places grew very strong. At one end was a hook, which he had apparently made himself by twisting a thin bar of iron.

"I thought as much," said Jim, with a catching of the breath; "and now, Morse, we shall be able to verify our suspicions."

They walked up to the dead man and turned him over. An exclamation burst from all three. That uttered by Romeo was of surprise, but, from Jim and Morse, the short, sharp cry was more the utterance that would follow a belief verified.

For there at their feet lay all that was mortal of Mr. Groby, the second master, whose story of passion and suffering had ended there.

His features, dirt-begrimed, were in repose; above them was the matted hair, unkempt during his time of madness as a dweller in the woods.

Under the strange, fantastic garb of leaves he had assumed there were the rags of his original clothing.

"Whatever his faults were," said Jim, in a low tone of voice, "he has paid the full penalty."

"Me no spect dis," said Romeo, with his eyes starting out of his head. "How me to know who it was?"

"It was just as well he did not get into the castle," said Morse, "for there is no knowing what crime he meditated. I am sure he was hopelessly mad."

Jim sat down upon a big stone hard by, resting his chin upon his hands, thinking. There was a short silence, which he presently broke.

"Nobody but we three know of this," he said.

"Well," inquired Morse, "what follows?"

"You woke your father and grandfather, Romeo?"

"Yes, Massa Gordon."

"And you told me they did not believe you had killed anyone?"

"Dat so. Dey call me a spiflicated liar, or sumfin quibalent."

"Now, Morse," said Jim, "do you think any good would come of our talking of this affair? I am thinking of Romeo. You know what Nap is. He may turn nasty one day, and there's no knowing what he might make of it."

"Groby is believed to be dead," mused Morse, "and, in common with most of the men here, has nobody in the old country to mourn his loss. It is a question for Romeo to decide."

"What am dat question, Massa Morse?" asked Romeo.

"Would you care for this sad business to be talked about?"

"Loramassy, no! What de good ob dat?"

"In all probability, if either of us had been in your place we should have done as you did. Again, the end of Mr. Groby must by the nature of things have been a violent one. You propose, Jim, to bury him quietly here?"

Jim nodded.

"Get two or three spades—quick," said Morse.

Romeo sped away, and while he was gone the two boys did their best to compose the limbs of the dead man. They did it in all reverence, although when living they had a strong reason for disliking him. Now that he had lost his life, and under such tragic circumstances, all was forgiven and in time would be forgotten.

Romeo speedily returned with the spades, and a grave of sufficient depth was soon dug. They laid the dead man in it just as he was, stood with bent heads for a minute in silence on the brink, and then filled it in.

"By-and-by," said Jim, "we will put a simple cross over the grave. Romeo, you will not chatter, will you? It is for your sake we are silent."

"Massa Gordon," said Romeo, impressively, "it a ting me not likely to forget; but who spect dat he make a ladder like dat," pointing to the twisted rope and hook, "and get it into him head dat he be able to trow it up to de winder and ketch on? He sensible so far, and no sorry he am killed. But when

a pusson try to get into de house dat way he must look for a rough deception. Me not going to talk, but me nebber forget him face when it show at de winder. Dere was nuffin but two blazin' eyes for me to know him by. Den me pull de trigger. Ugh! it was a fall for him. No, me not talk, but try to tink ob it no more."

The hook was severed from the rope of vine tendrils, and Jim took it back under his coat. Romeo tore the rope to pieces and scattered the material as they went.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

A BRIEF REST.—DIBBLE'S TOOTH.—SAILS ON THE HORIZON.



LEAVING the spades in the covered way just within the gates, the trio hastened to the great hall where they found old Chorker in a tearing rage over the absence of Romeo, which put all the

early morning work upon him.

"I'm goin' on strike," he was saying as they entered; "a man ain't got more than a certain amount of bone and muscle to play with, and mine is skumming to hard work."

He was addressing some of the boys, who had gathered round a wood fire lighted on the big hearth, for in the shade of the castle the morning was chilly.

"What de marrer wif you?" demanded Romeo.

"Where have you been?" asked Chorker. Then catching sight of Jim, his tone changed. "It comes werry hard, sir, for everything to be put on me. I ain't so young as I was."

Jim took no notice of him, but walked to the fire, where he stood warming his hands.

"Been out early, Jim," said Lal Brodie—"shooting, perhaps?"

"No; merely out—on another sort of business," said Jim.

Here a wrangle between Chorker and Romeo was heard. The latter said something about not being "bossed by a blooming nigger," which led that nigger to hustle him along the side of the table.

"Get out wif you," said Romeo. Call dis table laid? Be off and leab me to see to it. De back scullery want washing."

Chorker still remonstrated, so Romeo hustled him out of the hall and closed the door

"He jess got to know him place," muttered Romeo, "when he hear me talking. Morning, Miss Dibble."

"Good morning," replied Miss Dibble, who had just appeared, attired in a morning-gown of ancient make and faded flowery pattern.

She bobbed to the boys, who bowed to her, and smiled at Romeo, who for some reason was on the grin.

"Where is my graceless nephew?" she asked, looking round. "Not up yet? What a boy he is! When I had him at home I never could even wake him until he had been slipped."

"Dibble has the toothache," said Stiff, "but he is getting up."

"And where did he get that, I should like to know?" said Miss Elegantine. "Can any of you tell me?"

Nobody could, and a moment later Dibble came in to answer for himself.

Not only had he the toothache, but its frequent accompaniment also—a swollen face. One cheek stood out as if he had a tennis-ball in his mouth.

"Oscar," sharply cried his aunt, "you have been up to some wickedness."

"If I have," he replied, with his mouth awry, "I don't know it."

"No, indeed," said Miss Elegantine, shaking her head; "of course you don't know; you are too generally wicked to know when you *are* wicked."

She beckoned to him to come over to her, and, on examining his mouth, declared he must go to the dentist. On being told that there were no dentists there she said she must take the tooth out herself.

"All I want," she said, "is a pair of pincers. I drew out most of his first teeth."

There was a general shudder of sympathy for Dibble, who ventured to remark:

"But this is a second tooth, aunt."

"Second or third," she answered, composedly, "I'll have it out. I should like to see the tooth that would defy me."

"Oh lor'!" groaned Dibble.

The entrance of Mr. Farrell and the two undermasters, followed by Eveline and her mother, cut short the tooth discussion. Breakfast was served, and Dibble sat down beside Terry.

"I can't eat anything," he groaned.

"Sop your bread in your tea," suggested Terry.

"It isn't that," groaned Dibble. "I'm thinking of the torture of having that tooth out."

"But surely your aunt isn't serious."

"She is never anything else. She will have my head off before she gives up the job."

Terry reflected a moment or two, and by the brightening of his face seemed to have found a way for Dibble out of his misery.

"Peg away, old man," he said. "I'll arrange this

job with the old girl. Of course you don't mind keeping the tooth?"

"No; it doesn't ache now. The pain always goes off with the swelling."

Comforted by Terry's assurance, Dibble made a very good breakfast, and, acting on Terry's advice, slipped away directly afterwards to the ramparts, to remain there until he heard from or saw him.

Dibble, with some doubt in his heart if his aunt would not cut up rough over his disappearance, hastened to the ramparts, and sat there in all the tortures of doubt for more than half an hour.

At last Terry appeared with a beaming face.

"All right, old man," he said, "she's satisfied."

"How did you do it?" asked Dibble. "I should like to know. I never knew anyone who persuaded her yet to change her mind."

"I didn't do that. First of all I went off to the kitchen. On returning, I was just in time to hear her asking Martin for a pair of pincers and pliers. I told her she would not want them now. Martin walked off, for he seemed afraid of the old girl——"

"Everybody is when they get to know her."

"I'm not," said Terry, confidently. "Well, I got her quietly to myself, and I told her that she need not worry about the tooth any more, for I had drawn it."

"And, of course, she didn't believe you?"

"She did, for I showed her the tooth."

"Now, Terry——"

"Honour bright. I showed her a molar of such an enormous size, freshly drawn, that she was staggered. She took the tooth, and she says that when she gets back to England she will send it to the British Museum as a curiosity."

"But where did you get the tooth from?" asked Dibble.

"Out of one of those pigs' heads in pickle," replied Terry, as he burst into a roar of laughter.

"Oh, come, dash it!" exclaimed Dibble. "I don't want a pig's tooth handed about and shown as mine."

"It will be better than having your head wrenched out of its socket."

"But suppose she finds out the swindle?"

Terry suddenly became serious.

"She swallowed the yarn, head and tail," he said.

"But if she shows the tooth about, there isn't a man in the place who won't know what it is."

"Perhaps she won't show it."

"If she does, I shall be very sorry for you," said Dibble. "As for myself, I think I shall end it all by chucking myself off the ramparts."

Terry only laughed at this, but, truth to tell, he was a bit apprehensive on his own account.

Should Miss Elegantine discover the little trick played upon her, he might look out for squalls.

Lal Brodie was sentry on the ramparts, a duty Jim

considered it necessary to keep up. While the foregoing conversation was going on, he was leaning on the wall, gazing seaward.

"I wish one of you fellows would fetch Jim here," he said, suddenly.

Dibble did not think it advisable to show about the castle just at present, for fear his aunt should wish to look at the gap left in his jaw by the extraction of such an enormous molar.

Terry also was diffident about going there, too until Lal said it was important.

"Tell him," said Lal, "that there are a number of specks on the horizon. I think they are boats."

There was portent in this news, and Terry hastened below.

There were a number of boys in the courtyard, but Jim was not among them. He was in the hall with Martin, Morse, and two or three more.

Terry told his news, which had the effect of sending the entire party straight away to the ramparts. He lingered behind for a moment, to look at some papers they left upon the table.

For the most part they were covered in what were to him unintelligible hieroglyphics, mostly in Morse's handwriting.

There was also a sketch of a curious sort of gun with a long thin barrel, which puzzled Terry not a little.

But he soon recalled himself, and putting the papers in a heap, as they had been when the others departed, he was about to follow them, when Miss Elegantine suddenly appeared at the door that led to the kitchen.

"Young man," she said, "I want a word with you."

Terry felt all his strength settling down into his boots as he looked up and saw that deceived lady holding aloft a tooth.

CHAPTER CXXIX.

THE PENALTY OF DEALING IN FICTION.—THE TRUMPET OF WAR SOUNDS AGAIN.



It was the pig's tooth, and Terry shuddered. He cast a backward glance at the other entrance to the hall, but was recalled to the fact that it would be more perilous to fly than to remain, by Miss Elegantine's voice.

"Stop!" she said. "I want to talk to you. If you run away I will fly you!"

"Bu-u-ut I think I am wanted by-y-y Morse!" stammered Terry.

"You see that?" said Miss Elegantine, holding aloft the molar.

Terry stared at it with all his eyes.

"It is a tooth," he said.

"Thank 'you for nothing. Where does it come from?"

"You-ur pocket, ma'am."

"That is an evasive answer. Where did you get it from?"

"Is it the one I gave you, ma'am?" asked Terry, making a final evasive stand.

"You know it is," she answered. "Where did you get it from?"

"A pig's head!" wailed Terry.

"And you dared to palm it off on me as one of my nephew's teeth?"

She swept down upon him like an avenging blast of wind, and had him by the collar ere he could fairly think of flying.

Terry would have said something explanatory, but she gave him no time. She shook him until all the world was like peas rolling about in a drum. He fairly lost his wits. When he came to he was sitting on the stone floor of the hall, and the lady avenger stood before him holding her sides and suffering from a catching of the breath.

"I did it to save a murder," said Terry, getting upon his feet and preparing to bolt. "Dibble would have died with fright if you had broken his jaw."

"Is it likely I would have done such a thing?" demanded Miss Elegantine.

"Of course you would," insisted Terry; "seeing as he's got curly teeth."

"Curly teeth?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Terry, coolly. "Teeth that grow curly under the jaw."

"Preposterous!"

"It isn't," said Terry. "If you doubt my word try to draw his tooth, and then see what will be the end of it."

Miss Elegantine looked at him keenly, but Terry kept his countenance.

"The next time you are going to do something that will get you into trouble," he said, "I won't help you."

"Go away," she said; "if I had any means of proving the truth or falsehood of what you say I would do it. But I will run no risks for my ungrateful nephew. Tell him that he may suffer all his days with the toothache, and I won't even make a poultice for him."

"Certainly, ma'am," said Terry, as he vanished.

"Had her there," he grinned, as he hastened across the courtyard; "she couldn't see the teeth without

drawing them. I must put Dibble up to the wrinkle of the curly business."

He had no opportunity to do it just then, and the matter escaped his mind for the time. This was owing to Jim's coming hurrying down from the ramparts. He had a field-glass in his hand.

"Terry," he said, "there are a lot of our fellows down below on the beach. Run down and tell them to come in smart."

"What's the matter?" asked Terry.

"A host of blackguards coming from Minorea, I fear," replied Jim. "All hands must muster in the courtyard in half an hour. I must be sure—all are here before I close the gates."

Terry confounded the blackguards, and hurried away to carry out his mission. While he was gone Jim sent some of the boys into the kitchen and upstairs to make sure nobody but the boys on the beach were abroad.

Eveline soon appeared at the gate, where Jim was standing awaiting the coming of the party from below.

"Oh, Jim, is this dreadful news true?" she asked, as she clasped his arm.

"The boats are coming towards the island," he answered, gently, "that is all I can say. I am only preparing for an emergency."

"Why cannot they leave us alone?" asked Eveline.

"We have a very venomous woman at the bottom of it," answered Jim, bitterly, "but of course I do not consider her a fair sample of the sex."

Here the voice of Mr. Farrell was heard as he crossed the courtyard.

"I will not believe it," he was saying; "it is another of Gordon's preposterous pieces of trickery."

Eveline was standing with her hand still grasping Jim's arm. Her father caught sight of her, and angrily asked what she was doing there.

"You forget yourself," he said, "you think too much of that boy."

Eveline let go of Jim's arm, as she sadly replied:

"We have, papa, to rely upon him in time of trouble."

"Fiddlesticks! There is no trouble."

But the pallid face of the schoolmaster belied his words. And he looked at Jim, as if seeking further explanation.

"The man Leonardo," said Jim, quietly, "who was killed here, left a woman who loved him. Her name is Lucia di Valo. You know her?"

Mr. Farrell uttered a sound, something between a gasp and a groan. It answered for an affirmative reply.

"She threatened to avenge his death," continued Jim, "and I think it probable that some boats, now bearing down upon the island, bring with them some men she has urged on to attack us. She may lead

them herself, naving all the spirit of a Joan of Arc, without that wonderful woman's virtues."

Mr. Farrell groaned, and clenched his hands.

"Was there ever man tormented as I am?" he cried.

There was something bordering on the ludicrous in the impotent anger of the schoolmaster. And that was the view Eveline took of it. She blushed with shame, and Jim, turning away, feigned not to heed him.

"You had better go inside," said Eveline, "and leave everything to Gordon."

"Of course," said Jim, without turning round, "I may be mistaken. It may only be a small fishing fleet."

"You think so?" murmured Mr. Farrell, eagerly catching at a straw of hope.

"I trust so," returned Jim.

Terry had done his work well, for the boys now came hurrying in, and Mr. Farrell beat a retreat. Eveline went with him.

Among other things Jim had lately introduced was a series of bugle-calls, on the military principle. Lal Brodie was the performer on an old key-bugle, which had been unearthed from among the odds and ends hurriedly brought up when the schoolhouse was on fire.

In obedience to Jim's command he now sounded the "assembly," and everyone in the castle, excepting the Farrells and Miss Elegantine, foregathered there.

Jim had a muster-roll, which he read out, and all were there. The next thing to be done was to appoint the various men and boys to their respective duties. This was done, and the gates closed and made fast. Then came the consideration of using the two small pieces of ordnance as a means of defence.

They could be fired from the ramparts, but only at great inconvenience, and with disproportionate effect. Jim thought of Terry's original plan of firing through the portcullis from the platform, and decided to adopt it, with improvements.

A brief consultation with Sleery, the carpenter, gave him the welcome intelligence that a movable platform could be easily constructed from materials already in the castle. There was indeed a considerable store of wood there gathered for fuel, and stored away in the back lower offices.

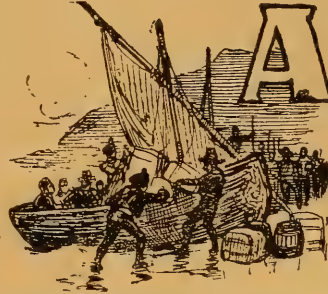
"Get it done as soon as possible," said Jim, and then with Morse and Martin he reascended to the ramparts to reconnoitre.

There were seven boats in all, varying in size, and they were making for the lagoon. The leading one was small, and Jim had no difficulty in recognising Lucia di Valo's little craft. The form of a woman in the stern, steering, he judged was Lucia, which subsequently proved correct.

She was alone, but the other boats were pretty well filled. In one there were twenty men, and in none less than ten. There were at least a hundred men in all.

CHAPTER CXXX.

WARM WORK THREATENED.—MORSE WILL BLOCK THE WAY.



A HUNDRED men led by that woman," said Jim, "may be considered dangerous."

"What a she-fiend she must be!" muttered Martin.

"Where a woman will go," remarked

Morse, thoughtfully, "there are few men who will not follow. Shame acts as a stimulant."

"I would rather there were two Reonardos with two hundred men," said Jim, "than Lucia di Valo with that lot at her call."

The boats had entered the neck of the lagoon, and were temporarily lost sight of. But they soon reappeared in the open, and, led by the craft of Lucia di Valo, ran inshore.

They grounded side by side, and as the men leapt out the watchers saw that each boat, save that of Lucia di Valo, was heavily laden. The men had brought arms, tents, food, drink, and ammunition.

They were too far off to take much count of their physique with the naked eye, but Jim with his glass could see them as clearly as if they were but a few feet away.

"A rough and tough lot," he said. "There are a lot of half-caste men among them. Some have as many as half a dozen weapons in their belts."

"What are those two big packages they are lifting out of the biggest boat?" inquired Morse.

Jim turned his glass in that direction, and saw that twenty men were required to lift a single package. It was something like a big post, wrapped in matting.

He was puzzled for a moment, and then a light broke in upon him.

"They have brought two pieces of artillery with them," he breathlessly exclaimed.

"They must be bigger than our poor little pop-guns."

"Bigger, Morse! Ten times the size. They have unrolled one. It looks to me like an old twenty-pounder from a man-of-war."

"Never!" exclaimed Martin.

"And now they are busy with the other—a pair," continued Jim. "They have also the carriages in separate pieces."

"I can see them," said Morse. "Heavy and strong."

"They will never be able to get them up here," said Martin.

"Oh, yes, they will," said Morse; "the guns can be dragged up the path, and the carriages carried piecemeal, if we allow them to do it."

"They will not attempt it to-day," said Jim, "for they are piling up the portions of the carriages over the guns, which are lying side by side. Ah! there is a fellow with a tarpaulin. He is covering the lot up."

"Suppose they get the guns up here," said Martin, "how long long will the gates stand against the shot?"

"Until they are struck," sententiously replied Morse. "But the guns are not in position yet."

"We have a night to consider what we shall do," said Jim.

"I have decided what to do," returned Morse, "and it cannot be done until night."

"What do you propose to do?"

"To destroy the path, and make it a chaos of stones and rocks and fallen trees."

His companions stared at him, wonderstruck.

"Can it be done?" asked Jim.

"Yes," was the reply; "I have the plan broadly in my mind. Give me an hour to work out the details."

"There goes the bugle for dinner," said Martin.

"Send me something up here," rejoined Morse.

"I can then do three things—eat my dinner, watch the enemy, and arrange my plans."

Knowing his humour, they left him; Jim, before going, handing him the glass.

Alone, Morse leant upon the wall, looking down upon the invaders for a time. They were busy pitching their tents, and doing it easily, like men who have a long time before them, and fear no interruption.

Lucia di Valo had a tent of her own apart from the rest, and she sat by the entrance of it smoking a cigarette, and talking to a young fellow who stood before her deferentially, hat in hand.

Everything pointed to leisurely movements on the part of the band below. In Lucia di Valo there was a vast amount of the cat. As Morse was surveying her camp with curious eyes, she was talking with one Vamos, who acted as her lieutenant.

Let us go below and take note of what is passing between them.

"It is my command," she said, as she jerked off the ash of her cigarette, not flicking it off with her finger

as a man would do, "that there shall be no haste."

"A good deed," he answered, "cannot be too quickly done."

"You are thinking of your reward," she said, with a smile.

"Who would not think of it?" he asked, passionately. "Did I not love you ere Reonardo spoke?"

A gesture of assent, coolly given, was the answer.

"You laughed at me as a silly boy. I was one then," said Vamos, "for it was a year ago. I am a man now."

"So great a change in twelve short months?"

"It is the change of a day, if you will. You came back with the tidings of Reonardo's death, and I ventured to renew the story of my love. What said you?"

"Help me to avenge Reonardo's death, and I am yours."

"It was that promise," passionately rejoined Vamos, "that made me a man, and shall I not be impatient to win so great a prize?"

"And shall not I enjoy my revenge?" demanded Lucia, proudly. "Did you ever see a cat play with a mouse?"

He answered with a shrug of the shoulders.

"I am the cat for the time," continued Lucia, "and yonder is my mouse, or mice, if you will. It is my purpose to keep them in suspense—to kill when I will, and not before."

"They are a right valiant band of youngsters, I am told," he said.

"So be it. But they are no match for a hundred men. With the two guns lent us by the governor we can at our leisure batter the walls of the castle about their ears. There is no hurry. To-morrow we will choose a position for them, fence ourselves about with earthworks, and they will not dare to assail us."

"You have the courage and coolness of ten men," said Vamos.

"Of men like you, do you mean?"

"I will give my life for you, and fifty men can do no more."

She held out her hand, and he took it, raising it to his lips. Then she motioned for him to leave her.

"To-night," she said, "the men may be merry. To-morrow we will begin to work."

Morse saw it all, although naturally he could not hear a word. His ready wit interpreted at least half the meaning of her actions.

"A Jezebel and a witch," he murmured, as he closed the field-glass, and leisurely began his dinner.

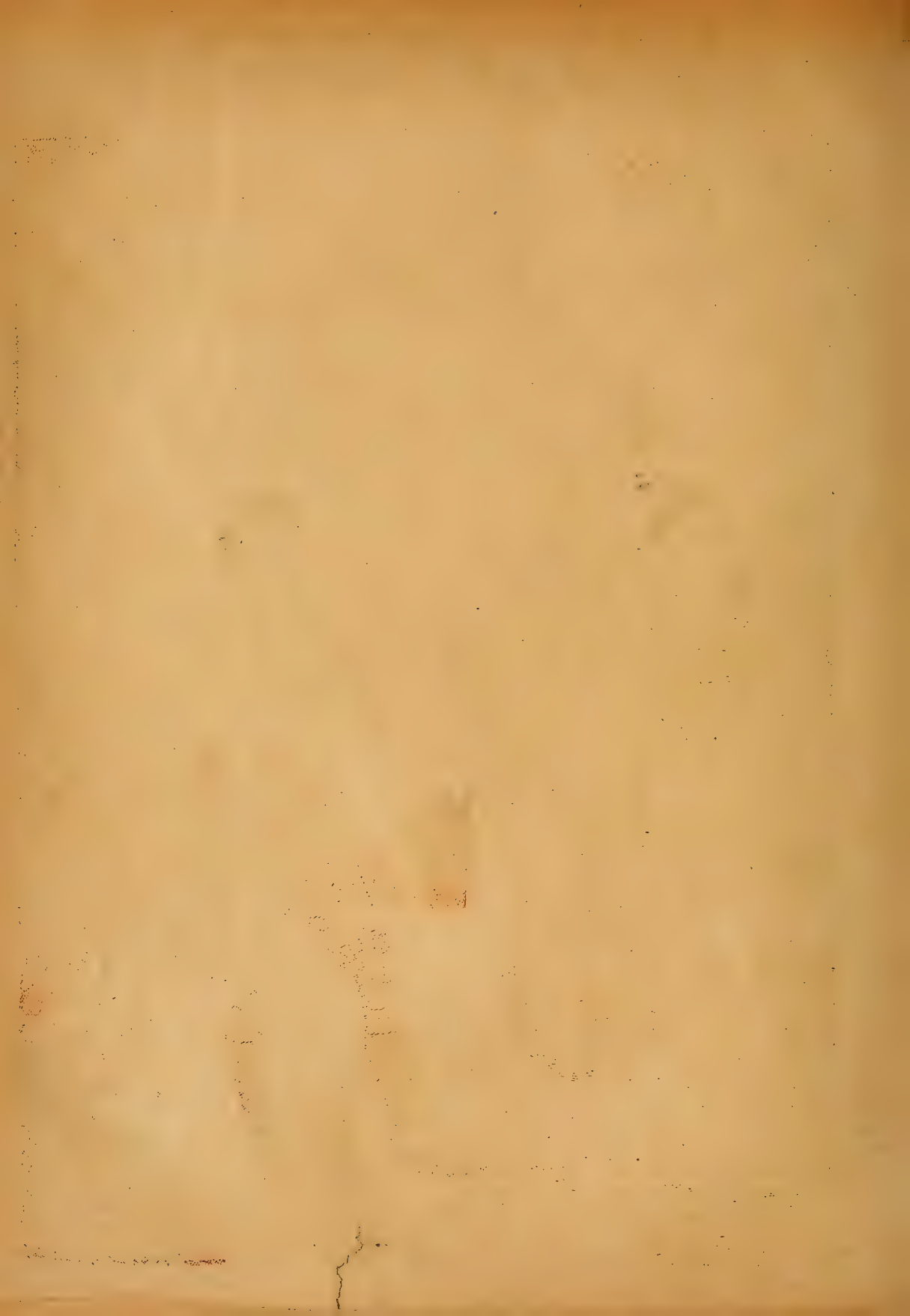
He was not long over it, and the rest of the time he had to himself he devoted to glancing below at the path, and making little outline sketches on a

SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



Morse got the pair down to the bottom of the flight of steps, where they were commanded to stand still, while Jim went back for the other master.



piece of paper. He was thus engaged when Jim returned.

"I have the whole thing ready," said Morse. "I shall require you and Martin and half a dozen of our coolest hands with rifles. What we propose doing must be known to none of the others. Romeo will have to act as gatekeeper."

"Is that all?" asked Jim.

"No; Martin must bring a drill or two, for preparing the rocks below for blasting. We must begin at the very bottom of the path."

"Can you give me the details?"

"Sit down."

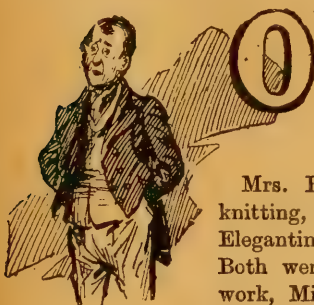
They sat down upon the stone flooring of the ram-parts, and Morse showed him the sketches he had made, explaining the details of the work he proposed to do. When he had finished, Jim drew a deep, long breath.

"It is a bold scheme, and should it succeed it will hold them off for the time. But will it be for long?"

"Deal with one emergency first," coolly replied Morse, "and when the next arises prepare to meet that in turn. That is what all good generals do, I fancy. We are cooped up here, but not captured yet. Those fellows are pretty well provisioned, but their provender won't last for ever. We may anyway hope to starve them *home*."

CHAPTER CXXXI.

PREPARING FOR THE NIGHT.—THE EXPEDITION.



"N my word," said Mr. Farrell, as he stood by the fire in the hall, "keeping school on this island is reduced to a mockery."

Mrs. Farrell sat near him, knitting, and Eveline and Miss Elegantine were seated hard by. Both were engaged in needle-work, Miss Elegantine having started making a pair of slippers for some person unknown.

The boys and men were buzzing about outside, varying the monotony of talking with flying visits to the ramparts, or to inspect Sleery's platform for the cannon, which was well on the way. For assistants he had Changeling and some of the boys that used to be with him in the workshop. They all toiled with a will, as if a prize awaited each at the conclusion of the job.

"I spoke to Gordon," said Mrs. Farrell, quietly, "and he told me that the teaching might go on, if you

wished it, with only a few of the boys relieved from work."

"And who is to teach in all this uncertainty and turmoil?" demanded Mr. Farrell. "I can't."

"You must make up for lost time when the troubles are over," said Miss Elegantine.

"You think we shall come through with them, then?" said the schoolmaster, nervously.

"I suppose so," said Miss Elegantine. "Why should we not, with such a boy as that young Gordon at the head of affairs?"

"Do you believe in him also?"

"Whom am I to believe in if I don't? Certainly none of you masters. You go about like jellies carried on a dish by a wobbling butler."

Mr. Farrell muttered something under his breath, and, taking up a book, sat down as if to read; but having held it upside down for some minutes, he laid it aside.

"I would rather live alone in the woods than endure such a life as this," he said.

Rainstone and Morse now came in. The latter went straight to the laboratory. Rainstone came up to the fire to warm his hands.

"Anything stirring, Rainstone?" asked Mrs. Farrell.

"No," he answered. "Those fellows below are lying about outside their tents; it is warmer down there than up here. They are playing cards and dice."

"As I imagined," said Mr. Farrell. "It is some picnic party from the mainland. All this preparation to defend the castle is tomfoolery."

It was in his nature to talk in this foolish way on the slightest provocation. Mrs. Farrell impatiently shrugged her shoulders.

"The men are all armed," said Rainstone.

Mr. Farrell started, and looked apprehensive again.

"They have brought with them two big cannon," Rainstone went on, "which will knock the castle walls about our ears if they get them into position. Jim Gordon says they will make no more of it than a cake of gingerbread."

"Better yield to them at once," said Mr. Farrell, hastily. "It—it will sp-a-re bloodshed."

"The woman, Lucia di Valo, is in command," said Rainstone; "and she has sworn to have all our lives!"

Miss Elegantine looked up from her work.

"If a woman is in command," she said, "it will be useless to ask for mercy. But," she added, grimly, "if she likes to settle the matter by single combat, I am ready for her."

"I'd back you, miss," said Rainstone, laughing.

"What is Morse doing in his room?" asked Mr. Farrell.

"Can't say, sir," answered Rainstone, maliciously ; "making his will, perhaps."

All the women laughed, they could not help it, Miss Elegantine shrilly. The schoolmaster glared at Rainstone for a moment, and then bounced out of the room.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Farrell, "you will not mind, Rainstone, telling me what Morse is doing?"

"He is up to something," said Rainstone, "but he keeps it close. At least, he wishes the few who know what it is to say nothing."

"Very well."

"We are quite safe until the morning, Jim says. He suggested to me," continued Rainstone, hesitating, "that I should ask you to prepare some lint for bandages ; it might be wanted. I came in to mention it, but Mr. Farrell being here, I did not like to scare him."

"You are the strangest lot of boys I ever met with," said Miss Elegantine. "Will you tell your general, this wonderful Gordon, that I should like to be enrolled as a volunteer?"

"I will, ma'am," answered Rainstone, "but I think he would rather the ladies were not in it."

"Tell him," said Miss Elegantine, "that two years ago three burglars came into my house in the middle of the night. I crippled two with a wood-chopper, and held the third till a policeman came."

"Good gracious !" exclaimed Mrs. Farrell.

"A woman with a chopper," said Miss Elegantine, unmoved, "is as good as a man with a sword. If ever they make a regiment of women in the army, as they may do, now that women are getting their rights, I should advise the authorities to arm them with choppers."

She looked, as she uttered these notable words, as if she would gladly command such a regiment. Mrs. Farrell made a mental note not to quarrel with her when choppers were lying about.

"Let us go and look up rags for lint," she said.

Rainstone waited until the women were gone, and then knocked softly at the laboratory door. Morse opened it.

"Oh ! it is you," he said ; "come in. Don't blunder against anything if you can help it."

Rainstone walked into the room as if the floor were covered with eggs, and he was under a heavy penalty not to break one of them. There were a number of jars on the table, and some small pieces of tubing, which he regarded with a suspicious eye.

"I want you to go on filling these tubes with wool," said Morse ; "here is a wooden rammer. You need not be afraid. Ram it in tight."

"There is something in this tube already," said Rainstone, peering down into it with one eye, and his head sideways.

"Yes, I know," quietly answered Morse. "Go to work, as I have a lot to do. Only be careful not to drop the tubes on the floor. No great harm might come if you did, but I can't be sure."

Rainstone proceeded to carry out the instructions he received, and Morse, in his deliberate, thoughtful way, brought out a minute pair of scales, with which he weighed out small portions of powder from different bottles, placed them on a piece of paper, mixed carefully, and put the whole into a tube.

In all, twenty were prepared and carefully laid in a box about a foot square, with wool between.

"For to-night, of course?" said Rainstone.

"Yes," answered Morse. "Ten would suffice, perhaps, but a little extra dose won't hurt."

"What's the lifting power of the lot?"

Morse smiled.

"I haven't calculated it to a ton or two."

"Well," said Rainstone, "what's the lifting power of one of them?"

"Depends upon what it is under, and how it is placed."

"A couple of tons, say?"

"Go into three figures, if rightly worked."

Rainstone gasped.

"Good heavens !" he exclaimed.

"Everything depends on the way it is used," said Morse.

"Morse," said Rainstone, leaning his elbow on the table, and staring at his friend in wonderment, "what a strange fellow you are !"

"My inventions and discoveries come natural to me," replied Morse, simply. "There are some things I shall always keep to myself, I think, because in the hands of evil-minded people they would be horribly dangerous."

He took the box containing the loaded tubes—metal-cased cartridges they may be called—and dismissed Rainstone to his other duties.

Shortly after Jim came in, and the pair conferred together. Then Martin appeared, and others in turn all interested in the work of the night, and individually and collectively they received instructions from the young chemist.

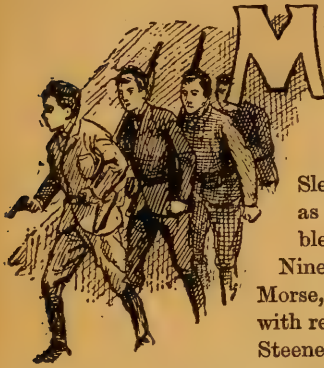
They were all very quiet. There was certainly an air of suppressed excitement, which was natural under the circumstances, but considering that all but Martin were boys, they were remarkably cool.

When they finally left the laboratory, they were asked questions by some outside, who were lounging about, suspicious of something being in the wind. The only answer they got was :

"You will all know our plans to-morrow."

CHAPTER CXXXII.

THE CAMP BELOW AROUSED.—MORSE AS A WRECKER.



MIDNIGHT had arrived. The party of action, as Morse called them, were at the castle gates, shifting back

Sleery's platform with as little noise as possible.

Nine in all. Jim Gordon, Morse, and Martin, armed with revolvers only; Terry, Steene, Ganthony, Hillyard, Dawson, and Rainstone, carrying rifles. All under the command to be dumb.

Without exchanging a word they got the platform back sufficiently to open the left-hand gate a foot or so. Then they passed out, and Romeo came out of the gloom in the rear to keep watch until they returned.

"Do not come further than the bridge," were Jim's instructions, given earlier, "and at the sight of a single stranger, get in and close the gates. If we do not return, Whiffer and Felton must do their best to defend the castle."

"Lor' ha' marcy on us!" thought Romeo, as the band of nine glided away, "if anything happen to you, Massa Jim!"

They walked absolutely without making a sound, for over their boots they had bound some pieces of sacking, which gave them a club-footed appearance.

Overhead the stars were brilliant, but the moon had gone down. The air was chill, and there was a breeze from the sea.

Morse led the way with the box containing the cartridges, carefully wrapped in sacking.

"In case I fall or trip," he said to Jim, when he was packing up the box in the hall.

But the path was thoroughly familiar to him, and one of the tasks he had performed that day on the ramparts was to make sketches of it, first as a whole, and then of its peculiar features, such as where rocks projected from the soil. In other words, he had made a map in detail and studied it to renew his mind on the exact topography on the sinuous way.

On the right it was almost unbroken wood. On the left, wood varied with deep, precipitous hollows. The only level spot on that side was where Mr. Farrell had read the first threatening letter he received, as seen by Jim and recorded in the opening chapters of our story.

But Morse, looking neither to the right nor the

left, pursued his way, followed by his companions, until he was almost at the bottom of the path. There he halted.

The wood was very dense on either side at this particular spot, but their eyes having become used to the gloom, the upraised hand of the leader was seen, and they all stopped short.

They knew from earlier instructions what was expected of them, and with their rifles under their arms, the six rank and file stood still. Jim and Martin went on with Morse.

Then came a trying time for those left behind.

The stillness was only broken by the rustling of the tree-tops by the breeze, which was, not very strong down there. Barring the woods, they could see nothing but the stars.

Waiting at that particular spot, they could see nothing of the beach or lagoon.

Suddenly a short, sharp sound, as of steel against stone, fell upon their ears. Then the voice of a man, speaking in the Spanish tongue, came from the camp. It was a challenge from someone on the watch.

A slight burring sound, as from the working of a drill followed. It was just below where they stood.

A minute had not elapsed ere the report of a rifle was heard from the camp. Immediately after, J was heard close by, speaking in a low tone.

"Advance, all of you. Come steadily."

The riflemen, as they may be termed, stepped briskly down until they came to the trio. Jim and Martin were standing erect, revolver in hand. Morse was kneeling upon the ground, close to a huge piece of rock, as big as an ordinary house.

The bearers of the rifles could see the camp on the shore now. Lights were being lit up, and there were sounds of voices and hurrying to and fro.

"Steady, now," whispered Jim. "Get in front, you fellows, and wait the signal. They will soon be coming for us. Fire at the word, and not before."

"I deserve hanging," muttered Martin, "for dropping that drill upon the ground."

"Can't be helped," replied Jim; "don't fret. Perhaps it will all be for the best. They are moving now. What asses, coming on as thick as a bunch of grapes! Can you see them, boys?"

A low murmur of assent was the reply. The hearts of the majority were thumping so heavily against their ribs that they sounded like advancing footsteps.

Jim judged by the size of the knot of Spaniards approaching—silently, by way of a change from their ordinary habit—that they numbered about thirty. It was a large force to bring out to investigate the nature of a solitary sound; but it was a proof of the wholesome fear they had of their boyish adversaries.

Jim kept quite still until the men were within thirty yards of them. The young riflemen, in the

gloom, unseen, had steadily covered the Spaniards with their weapons.

"At the word," said Jim, again, "you will fire. Then turn and get up the path as quickly as you can."

Another moment, and then he cried:

"Fire!"

The boys discharged their rifles, and, promptly wheeling about, bolted up the path. To their surprise, Jim and Martin accompanied them. Morse alone remained behind.

There were shrieks of pain and yells of wrath from the Spanish or half-caste body of men on the shore, attesting the accuracy of the aim of the young sharpshooters.

"Get on to the castle," said Jim; "you have done your work. Remain at the gate until we come."

He kept with Martin, and a moment after the six riflemen disappeared, Morse came tearing up.

"The shooting checked them," he said, "but they are coming on again. Higher up, Martin. Give me the drill. I think they will reach *there* just in the nick of time."

They dashed upwards another twenty yards or so, and Morse halted again by a group of rocks with tall trees growing round them.

"Number two," he said—"but listen—it is time——"

An explosion, that made the ground tremble and the trees rock, rent the air. There was no flame to speak of, but the whirling of masses of rocks among the trees and in the air, mingled with the terrified yells of men below.

"In the nick of time," said Morse, "they were well on the spot. The way is blocked. We can take our time now."

"It was well done," said Martin, between his teeth.

"Did I not say that the dropping of the drill might be all for the best? We have taken a lot out of those fellows already."

"That is all very well and kind of you," replied Martin, "to talk in that style; but a bungle is a bungle, and I ought not to have made it."

"You may go on now," said Morse. "Stop at the next point."

It had all been prearranged, for they went forward without a word.

The next halting-place was near the level we referred to as the spot where Mr. Farrell read the disquieting letter. They stood there a minute listening to the cries of rage on the beach below, and then Morse joined them again.

He selected a spot on the level ground, and resumed his drilling labours, barely begun ere a second terrific explosion was heard below.

A roar as of forty cannon mingled with the crash of

falling timber, a disquieting riot that was like the returning of chaos.

Morse went on with his work in no wise troubled, but both Jim and Martin felt the natural awe inspired by this evidence of the power of the young chemist's inventive genius.

He soon had the third receptacle ready, and placed three of the cartridges in it.

"We must make this as widespread as possible," he remarked.

So they went on as before, and the third explosion followed. Morse always remained behind to light the fuse, and to see it was well aglow ere he left the spot.

Thus from point to point they traversed the entire path, reaching the summit at last, where they found a breathless throng awaiting them.

The whole of the schoolboys—indeed, all within the castle—were stirring, and the majority abroad. Some were below, others on the ramparts, and all boiling over with excitement, and, in the case of some, with terror.

"Stand firm!" cried Morse; "the biggest blow-up of all is about to take place. No harm will happen to you; but stop your ears and shut your eyes if you like."

Many stopped their ears, but none could shut their eyes. All stood dumbly awaiting the promised explosion. It was longer coming than any of the others after the fuse had been lighted. Morse had made arrangement for that; he was so methodical in everything.

But it came at last, and then the amazed spectators beheld a wondrous sight. About fifty yards from the top of the path the earth seem to rise *en masse*, taking with it rocks and trees into the air, just as if they had been discharged from an enormous mortar.

The trees rose about sixty feet, and then came toppling down in inextricable confusion upon each other. Then the rocks and stones and earth fell upon the mass, forming a huge mound with jagged stumps and branches sticking out in every direction.

A cloud of fine dust hovered in the air, obscuring the stars for a while, and in the dreadful stillness that followed the voice of Morse was suddenly heard. For once in a way he spoke exultingly, and his clear voice rang in the ears of all above and below.

"It will puzzle them now," he cried, "to get their cannon up *that way*!"

There was another stillness, and then the boys burst into loud hurrahs, that must have been heard all too clearly by their astounded and discomfited foes.

CHAPTER CXXXIII.

NOCTURNAL EXCITEMENT.—MOVEMENTS OF THE ENEMY.



IT beats all the fireworks ever seen," said Terry.

He made this remark to Dawson as they hastened into the castle after the last bit of work done by Morse.

The interior of the castle was now like a fair. Everybody was up, and nobody had performed what may be considered a complete toilet.

Among other remarkable exhibitions of dishevelment was that of Miss Elegantine Dibble, who not only had her clothes on as if she had rolled into them, but had fixed her false front on the hind part before.

Morse and Jim held a short, quick conference.

"Safe from the cannon for days," said Morse, "that is a dead-sure thing. But of other forms of attack I won't be cocksure. Somebody must remain on the ramparts to-night, and as I am for once rather excited, I think it had better be me."

"I will keep you company," said Jim; "sleep and I have parted company for some hours."

"Say a few words to this noisy lot," said Morse.

They were in the hall, which was crowded with all talkers and no listeners. Next to the two leading heroes and Martin, the eight sharpshooters came in for a full share of popularity.

Jim jumped upon the nearest chair, and those nearest to him called aloud for order. In a minute complete silence was obtained.

"I merely wished to say," began Jim, "that there is no need for any of you to remain up. Morse and myself are going to keep watch, and we do not think there is anything to fear. Of course you can do as you please."

He looked round as he was speaking in search of Eveline, whom he had not noticed since he came into the hall. She was standing by her mother near the fireplace, both in a wide-eyed state of astonishment. Indeed, to many there the whole thing had the elements of a dream.

"You have not explained why you have been blowing up half the island," remarked Miss Elegantine.

"Our foes below have two cannons," answered Jim, "which they no doubt intended to haul up here, so that the gates of the castle might be battered in. Morse has made the path inaccessible."

"Good old Morse!" cried Felton, and then the whole of the boys burst out singing:

"For he's a jolly good fellow,
And so say all of us.
With a hip, hip, hip, hurrah!" etc.

When the sounds ceased Miss Elegantine had another question to ask.

"I wish to know," she said, "if there is any more of that extra powerful powder about?"

Jim looked at Morse, who shook his head.

"There is no more about," said Jim, aloud.

"I am thankful for that," said Miss Elegantine; "for if I knew there was an ounce of it within a mile of me I could not sleep a wink."

"But I could mix two pounds of it in ten minutes," muttered Morse, just loud enough for Jim to hear.

"I cannot but admire you boys," pursued Miss Elegantine. "But if I had for a moment dreamt of the way you go on here I should have stayed at home."

"Don't you wish you had dropped the old lady a line?" asked Terry, jogging the elbow of Dibble, who was among the dumbfounded ones of the night.

"I would have written all I know, and a little more," replied Dibble.

Jim and Morse departed, but there was no movement towards the bedrooms. Mr. Farrell, who stood near his wife, occasionally clutching his hair, as if he wanted to get it up by the roots as a relief to his feelings, remained with the rest.

Macbeth and Hamlet, having found out that Romeo had some share in the night's work, were plying him with questions, and he was giving them answers which implied that he had been one of the chief, if not *the* chief actor of the night.

"You bet your larse dollar on dis," he said; "if you got not'ing else to be proud ob, you got *me*."

There was Charley, the bear, too, who for once in a way seemed to have had a shaking, for he wandered rather helplessly about the hall, occasionally going through one of his tricks without any regard to the fact that he had no audience. Finally, in a state of helpless wonderment, he lay down at the feet of Eveline, and sought refuge from distracted thought in sleep.

Charley was a terror to Miss Elegantine, who could not understand anyone trusting a bear about without a muzzle and a cage as well. She was sure that one day he would go to work and make a meal of somebody—probably herself. As for the boys, they made a holiday of it, just as some children do at home when they are now and then called up very early to have breakfast by candlelight.

Mrs. Farrell said they could have some coffee and bread-and-butter if they chose, and they spread the board with the assistance of Romeo. It was very

enjoyable—"almost as good as a play," as somebody remarked, and there was as much merriment as if it had been an occasion of great festivity.

Meanwhile the two close chums, Jim and Morse, having taken up their post on the ramparts, looked down below. They did not expect to hear anything, and there was little to see, nothing more than a light or two moving to and fro.

"We have not scared them away," said Morse.

"They have Lucia di Valo with them," remarked Jim. "She is here for a purpose, and she won't budge until it is attained, or while she has a man to stand by to aid her."

"We shall not be troubled by them to-night, Jim."

"No, nor in the morning, perhaps. I don't fear them if they have to leave their cannon behind."

Feeling that all was secure, they went down to inspect Sleery's platform. It was all but completed. Another two hours in the morning would finish it, and then Betsy and Bella, the two small guns, could be put into position.

Changeling came out of the hall to take his turn at sentry work. He stopped to salute and grin—his way of expressing respect and admiration.

"I reckon, gentlemen," he said, "that one of these days you will be a-blowin' the ole island out of the sea."

"Well, not just yet," replied Morse. "I have not got further than thinking of blowing off one side of it."

"You will be the death of old Nap," grinned Changeling, as he stepped up the stairs.

They had been away from the hall about an hour and a half, and when they returned the first feeling of hilarity was over. The coffee and bread-and-butter had been partaken of, and the merriment was more subdued. Some of the boys were dozing peacefully in their seats. The women folk had disappeared.

By the fire sat Napoleon Farrell and his two assistant masters. They were gloomily conversing in whispers, but on perceiving Jim they became silent.

"Hatching another bolt?" said Jim.

"If they want to go, let them be off as soon as they like," said Morse.

As there was still some coffee left, the two friends partook of it, and afterwards joined the sleepers in a short but refreshing nap.

When they awoke, somebody said the day was about to dawn. There were not half the boys left in the hall. Many had stolen away to their rooms—"just for forty winks," and those that were there exhibited all the signs of having been up all night, in the way of red eyes, yawning and languid movements generally.

"You fellows want a good sluicing with cold water," said Jim, and there was a general movement to the back of the castle.

The water-supply of the building was a very simple matter. It was ever running from a spring that centuries before had been conducted through the wall by means of a stone pipe. It was a perennial flow resulting from the drainage of the higher woodlands.

The water fell into a stone basin which was of the nature of the modern scullery-sink, inasmuch that it had a drain-pipe to let off the surplusage. The consequence was that there was no overflow.

The boys got two or three buckets, which they filled with water, and gave themselves a thoroughly invigorating wash.

Then Jim hastened away to the ramparts, and Morse retired to his laboratory. Changeling was still on duty, and by the time Jim joined him the daylight had arrived, and the sun was well above the horizon.

"They've started a boat away, Master Gordon," said Changeling. "There she goes."

Jim looked in the direction pointed out by Changeling, and saw a boat with two men in her bearing up for Minorca.

On the sands, ashore, the men were busy with an early morning meal.

"I know what that means," said Jim; "they have come to stay, and those two men have been sent for reinforcements."

He wondered how many men had been killed the previous night, but his curiosity on that head was soon satisfied. The meal being over, some of the men went to work digging three graves near the camp.

They did not concern themselves to make the very deep, but deep enough in all probability, for that spot they were not likely to be disturbed.

The graves being ready all the camp turned out, and the dead were brought forth on improvised stretchers. They were buried with their clothing, and some show of reverence.

During the ceremony nothing was seen of Lucia di Valo, but when it was over she came out from her tent, and by the hastily filled graves gave an oration that seemed to rouse her followers to a pitch of madness.

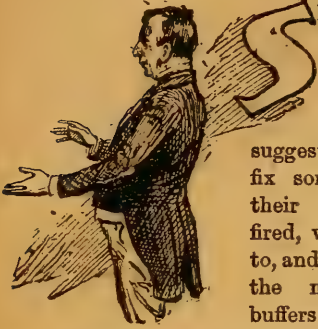
Nothing could be heard, save the softest of murmurings arising from their combined voices lifted in anger, but the upraised hands holding the glittering blades were sufficiently expressive.

"A fierce, implacable woman," said Jim, as she went back to her tent, followed by her men cheering wildly. "Now it will be a fight to the bitter end."

"She certainly do seem to be a hot 'un," admitted Changeling, "what they calls a bit of a scorcher. I pities the man who may make the mistake of marrying her."

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

THE GUNS IN POSITION.—MR. FARRELL MAKES A PROPOSITION.



LEERY had the platform ready by ten o'clock, and the two small guns were placed upon it. His suggestion that he should fix something to prevent their running back when fired, was of course, agreed to, and he spent the rest of the morning in making buffers with a spring similar

to those, only on a smaller scale, we see at railway-stations.

"You won't be able to repeat your old performance, Terry," said Jim to that most original of artillerymen, who was watching Sleery at work.

"I am not eager to do it," said Terry. "I really thought I had brought the castle down."

"Jim—Jim!" sang out someone from the courtyard.

"Here!" replied Jim.

It was Dibble, who came hurrying in with a grin on his face.

"Nap wants you," he said; "if not too much trouble, will you go up to his room?"

"Did he put it so politely?"

"He did. More than that, he said that if you were very busy he could wait."

"I'll go at once," said Jim. "What on earth is in the wind now?"

They turned back together, Dibble showing by his manner than he had something more to say.

"Auntie," he said, suddenly, "wants to know if she can have a rifle?"

"I think not," answered Jim, "unless she knows how to handle it."

"Which she doesn't," said Dibble, "but you had better let her have one for all that. She also wants some cartridges, to be ready for the blackguards below when they come this way."

"Very well," said Jim, "tell her I will attend to it by-and-by. She had better have a little instruction in the management of the weapon."

Dibble hastened away with the glad tidings to his aunt. She would be immensely gratified by Jim's assenting to her proposal. There was a warlike spirit in her destined to bear fruit in the near by-and-by.

Mr. Farrell was in his room, pacing up and down

with the restlessness of a perturbed man. He welcomed Jim by holding out both his hands. Jim, not knowing what else to do, took them, and the school-master worked them up and down half a dozen times, as if they were old friends who had met after a long separation.

"Gordon," he said, "you never bear animosity, do you?"

"Not that I am aware of, sir," replied Jim.

"There have been times when I have been—been—ahem!—somewhat eccentric in my conduct towards you."

"I can't deny it, sir."

"They have been times of irritation and excitement."

"Yes, I admit it."

"You will therefore overlook all I have said and done?"

"I have thought little or nothing of it."

"Very good"—Mr. Farrell hesitated a moment—"then let me come to the point." He stopped again, and stared at Jim in an embarrassed way. "The fact is, I have been talking with Mr. Storeby and Turner, and our united opinion is that we are at the present juncture—in—in the way."

Here was something else Jim could hardly deny. They were three useless encumbrances in the castle.

"You need not apologise for that, sir," said Jim. "We can't all be on a footing with regard to usefulness."

"You admit we are encumbrances, then?"

"In a sense I do, sir."

"Then," said Mr. Farrell, quite briskly, "why not get rid of us?"

Jim was utterly taken aback by this question. He wondered at a proposition that was bordering on a suggestion for him to take the lives of the precious trio. At least, that was the way he looked at it.

"Get rid of you, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, and nothing more easy, I should say. You remember when I was captive in the cave with that skunk Chorker?"

Jim bowed.

"Well, who rescued me?"

"Morse was the chief factor in it, sir."

"Just so, and how did he get at me? Not by the chine entrance to the cave—now, did he?"

Jim was silent.

He was not at all prepared to take Mr. Farrell into his confidence with regard to the trap-door in the laboratory.

"He came from the castle," said Mr. Farrell. "I know it. Now, I have not sought to find out the way he came, because I have no desire to leave you secretly. All I intend to do must be done *openly*."

He looked awfully virtuous as he made this declaration. Jim felt as if he could have punched his head.

"Openly," repeated the schoolmaster—"openly. I desire to leave the castle, because I am in the way. I hinder your movements. You do not feel free to act with me, the real head of the place, always hovering around you. As my second and third in authority—Storeby and Turner—share my feelings, we therefore desire to go away and live in the cave, or elsewhere we may find convenient; but it must be with your consent and connivance."

Jim was getting into a denser fog than ever. The proposition amazed him. He could not believe that it came from a man in his right mind.

"We shall not be far away," pursued the schoolmaster, "and it will not be a difficult matter to communicate with us, so that we are provided with—ahem!—food and—ahem!—a few other necessaries."

"Oh!"

Jim understood it all now.

It was a proposition that exceeded in meanness and cowardice all that he had received from the schoolmaster before, and it was in his heart for the moment to give a flat refusal.

But his more prudent spirit came to his aid. These three men were in the way. It would be better for them to be gone, and possibly some arrangement for getting them away without their knowing too much might be made. But he would not decide on such a momentous matter without a consultation with Morse.

"I am taken somewhat by surprise," said Jim, "by this proposal, and I cannot decide what to do without consulting others."

"Quite right," cheerfully assented Mr. Farrell. Then, his manner suddenly changing, he added: "You do not include Mrs. Farrell among those it is necessary to consult, I hope?"

"No," answered Jim, with unwonted curttness; "it is not a matter for women."

"You are right again," said Mr. Farrell, approvingly. "Whe-e-en do you think you will be able to give me an answer?"

"Some time to-day, sir. Is there anything else you wish to say?"

"Not now, Gordon, my brave boy—not now."

"Then I will leave you, sir."

"You will do your best to persuade the others to fall in with my wishes?"

"I will do nothing to hinder them."

"Thank you, Gordon. I am your debtor for life."

CHAPTER CXXXV.

THE DEPARTURE OF THE SCHOOLMASTERS.—A DISCOVERY IN THE MORNING.



WHEN he got outside the room, Jim stopped to get breath. The interview had been almost too much for him.

"I did not dream," he murmured, "that there could be any addition to his meanness and curtness, but this beats all that has happened before. Surely there can be no deeper

depth for him!"

But he had no time to waste in communings, and he hastened off to the laboratory, where he knew he would find Morse.

The secret of the existence of the trap-door had never gone beyond the more trustworthy of the boys, and, owing to the wholesome dread entertained by Mr. Farrell and other objectionable members of the fraternity, of Morse's stock of explosives, a secret its existence would have remained.

To preserve it Jim was fully resolved, because he knew that fear had scattered what little feeling of honour Mr. Farrell might at any time have had in his nature.

If by selling the lives of all in the castle he could make sure of saving his own, he would do it. There was not a shadow of doubt on that score.

Morse was, as Jim expected, busy in his laboratory. He was manufacturing gunpowder, and Martin, he said, was in the kitchen, casting bullets in a mould, with the aid of Romeo.

"I sent him there," said Morse, "because I did not wish to worry the ladies. Besides, Farrell might have interfered with Martin in the hall."

"He is in another mood," said Jim, and then he explained the nature of the recent interview with the schoolmaster.

Morse listened without showing any great surprise.

"I thought something was in the wind," he said; "but nothing the man may do in that line astonishes me. He had better go. You and I can manage it alone. See them all and swear them to secrecy. Then appoint eleven to-night in the dining-hall."

"You were up all last night."

"So were you. But neither of us need be up all to-night. Furthermore, I mean to rest an hour or two this afternoon."

"But had we not better have somebody else? There are three of them."

"Never mind if there were thirty of their breed. We need not trouble about that. Make the appointment, and you will see that it is all right."

Jim was satisfied. Morse never spoke decidedly on any subject unless he was pretty certain of his ground. So he hurried back to the schoolmaster's room, where he found all three concerned assembled together.

Storeby and Turner must have been lying in waiting when Jim was interviewing the schoolmaster, and after the departure of the youth have gone into the room to hear the result.

Jim merely explained that the proposition was approved of, on condition that it was not talked about.

"You see," he said, naively, "if it gets known that you are thus favoured, we shall have a lot more who will want to follow you. Chorker, for instance, would be one of the first to insist on it."

"Chorker be hanged!" said Mr. Farrell, and the other two, with a lively recollection of the treatment they had experienced from that old fraud, echoed the sentiment heartily.

"To-night at eleven, then," said Jim, "and we will see how it can be worked. Bring a couple of blankets with you. There are some corners in the cave for you to sleep in, and you may want them."

"Will there be any objection to my bringing a small portmanteau down with me?" inquired Mr. Farrell, "with something by way of change of clothes in it."

"No. All might do it, as there is no knowing how long you will have to stay."

They renewed their promise of secrecy, and he left them.

All that day there was no movement that was particularly threatening among the men below. They did their cooking, and lay about smoking and gambling as they had done before. Little was seen of Lucia di Valo, but in the afternoon Jim caught a glimpse of her as she came to the entrance of her tent to speak to one of her men.

What did this supineness mean? Possibly they were waiting for reinforcements from Minorca, although that seemed to be improbable, for their loss had not been great.

Perhaps they were waiting for some new armament of war.

Morse, in the afternoon, was busy looking among a lot of lumber which had been brought up from the old schoolhouse. After a time he unearthed about six feet of three-inch iron piping, with which he seemed well pleased.

He took it to Martin, and told him he wanted it fixed on a stand that two or three people could move, and be fixed so as to work on a centre rod.

"With a catch," explained Morse, "so that I can incline it at different angles."

"What's in the wind now?" asked Martin.

"A blow-pipe," replied Morse, laughing.

"A blow-up pipe o' some sort, I bet," muttered Martin.

From Martin, Morse went to Sleery, and gave him a commission to split up two pine-boards into long rocket-sticks, smooth and round, so that they would travel easy. Sleery was quite as curious as Martin, but was, like the blacksmith, left unsatisfied.

Eveline and her mother appeared at meals, so did Miss Elegantine, and all had small pieces of cotton clinging to their dresses, indicative of the lint-making.

Nothing was reported by the sentries as they took up their posts in turn, and the night came at last with its usual hilarity on the part of the youngsters.

But it was more subdued than usual, for the fatigue engendered by the night before was upon them, and, without any hinting on the part of Jim, they dropped off to bed, until he and Morse and the three ladies remained.

Martin and the men invariably went off to the ample kitchen shortly after tea, for a smoke.

None of the masters stayed a moment after they had partaken of the meal that night.

Mrs. Farrell seemed to have a suspicion that something was in the air, but after two or three wasted questions on the two chums, she made no further effort to get at the facts.

Miss Elegantine informed Jim that she would be pleased to take her first drilling lesson on the morrow.

"Save us!" said Mrs. Farrell. "You really don't mean to fight?"

"Why not?" said Miss Elegantine, composedly. "I intend to carry a rifle and chopper, and if I get alongside any of those wretched Spaniards, I will set my mark upon them."

"She'll do it," muttered Morse.

The conversation soon flagged, and by a quarter past ten the hall was empty. But not for long. Almost immediately afterwards, Morse came down again and entered the laboratory, where he remained until the hour of eleven—alone. By that time the trio of masters were down and seated by the embers of the dying fire.

Though about to be assisted out of a place where they lived in a state of perpetual fear, they nevertheless were as gloomy as men sentenced to be hanged. They exchanged a few words in whispers.

"It is fully eleven, isn't it?" inquired Storeby.

"I should say so," replied Mr. Farrell; "but I cannot tell the time, since that thief Chorker stole my watch."

They anathematised the old man in concert, and then there was another silence.

"Seems to me that this is a sell," said Turner, suddenly.

"Gordon would never so deceive me," exclaimed Mr. Farrell, turning ghastly pale with mingled anger and fear.

"I wouldn't trust one of the boys, and, least of all, him," grumbled Storeby.

"Turner may give his opinion now," said Mr. Farrell, gazing wistfully into the fire.

"I am past giving an opinion on any subject whatever," said Turner, gloomily.

At this moment Jim entered the hall, and they sprang from their seats as if they had been one person, with the light of hope in their eyes.

"I am a little late," said Jim. "You have seen the others, of course?"

"No," they replied, in a chorus, dismay again laying hold of them.

"Then they are still in the laboratory."

Jim crossed over, and knocked softly at the door. A muffled voice bade him enter. He disappeared for a minute, and then returned, bringing with him three thick handkerchiefs, which he threw upon the table.

"You must all be blindfolded," he said, "and when that is done, if any one of you attempts to peep out, he will be left behind."

"We are willing to abide by your ruling in the matter," said Mr. Farrell.

Jim bade them sit down by the fire, and with great care bound the handkerchiefs over their eyes, at the same time he gave to each man his bag to carry.

"None of you can see," he queried.

They all assured him that they were in complete darkness.

Here one or more other persons were heard moving about the hall, but nothing was said for a time. Then a hand was laid on Mr. Farrell's arm, and he was told to rise. He failed to recognise the voice. It was Morse who had him by the arm, and he led him out by the door that communicated with the passages leading to the kitchen.

In and out of that domestic retreat he was led, into one of the back rooms, up and down the passage twice, and then taken back to the hall and into the laboratory.

"Be careful now," said Morse, in the feigned voice he had assumed. "Steps."

As soon as he started downward, Jim, who was quietly watching them, took Mr. Storeby's arm and led him by the same in-and-out way, leaving Mr. Turner in a trembling state behind.

They got the pair down to the bottom of the flight of steps, where they were commanded to stand still.

Morse remained behind to see that they obeyed the injunction, and Jim went back for the other

master, whom he in due time brought along. On his shoulders he carried their blankets.

On the ground was a lantern, which Morse now bound to his chest, and taking an arm each of the two first comers, he silently urged them forward. Jim followed with Turner and the load of blankets.

Not a word was said during the long underground journey to the mouth of the cave. There Jim commanded them to sit down, and they complied with the request like lambs. He threw down the blankets at their feet.

"For ten minutes," he said, "you will neither move nor speak. At the end of that time you may take off your bandages and make yourselves comfortable for the night."

"How are we to know when the time is up?" asked Mr. Farrell.

"Guess it," shortly replied Jim.

"But there is one thing more I would like to know," said Mr. Farrell. "How far are we allowed to penetrate into the cave in case we should feel it necessary to retreat?"

"You are not to go out of sight of the mouth of it. If you do you will discover that a very dangerous trap has been set for you. But *you will not be able to make any complaint about it!*"

"Then if we should be discovered here by those rascally Spaniards, we must allow ourselves to be made prisoners of or killed outright?"

There was no answer, for Jim and Morse, with noiseless footsteps, had glided away.

It was fully half an hour ere the schoolmaster ventured to take the bandage from his eyes. Behind him was the dark cave, ahead the chine, and above the gleaming stars.

"You may take off those handkerchiefs," he said to his companions.

They did so, and looked about them. A groan escaped Turner's lips.

"I do not think we are much better off than we were in the castle," he said.

"Worse," muttered Storeby. "There we had company and somebody to protect us."

"It is a case of being between the devil and the deep sea."

"You are an ungrateful pair of hounds!" said Mr. Farrell, fiercely.

"Ungrateful," muttered Storeby. "Why should we show you any gratitude? It was your idiotic idea to get away and hide in the cave. You said that if the castle was taken, those ruffians would kill all in it and not dream of our being here. Then they would go away and we should get a chance of being taken off by some passing vessel."

"It was your snivelling that led me on to make the arrangement."

"It was not. *You* first thought of running away, only there was no door to leave by. Wasn't it so, Turner?"

"I don't know," answered Turner, miserably. "I don't know anything. I am getting light-headed."

"Oh, cursed fate!" muttered Mr. Farrell, "wherever I go I find nobody but knaves and—and cowards!"

"Coward yourself!" said Storeby, passionately. "You dare——"

"Don't quarrel, you two," pleaded Turner; "I can't stand it. In my belief, it is all a trick of the boys, and in the morning they will come for us again. I can see the blankets. Let us try to get some sleep."

"If we have been made fools of, they shall suffer," said Mr. Farrell between his teeth, "when—when the island is clear of that gang of ruffians!"

Seeing that the other two had taken up their blankets, and were lying down out of the draught, he followed their example, and, notwithstanding their fears, the three deserters, as they may rightfully be called, yielded to fatigue, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

ACTIVITY OF THE ENEMY.—SHARPSHOOTING.



ON the morrow, when the three men were missing, there was something approaching an outcry, and

much speculation as to the manner of their going.

Mrs. Farrell and Eveline said nothing, but accepted the departure of the schoolmaster with resignation. Miss Elegantine hoped that she would one day be able to give them a

bit of her mind.

"I knew they were up to something, whispering together," she said. "The cowards, to run away! I have often wished I had been a man, but I am glad I am not if there was an atom of a chance of being one of their pattern."

Chorker was of an opinion that they had squeezed themselves through the iron-work of the portcullis, and he was left to enjoy his view of it, although everyone knew that it was a practical impossibility. Romeo was certain that they had dropped out of one of the high windows, most likely that in his room, where he had shot the wild man.

He ventured to give the idea to his sable progenitors, who scouted it.

"You fust see a chap gittin' in," said Macbeth,

"and now you talk ob tree ob dem droppin' out. You getting a bit wrong in your capacelties."

"If dey drop out dere," said Hamlet, sententiously, "dey dere now, for sure. "No man fall dat height wifout breakin' him legs."

To test the possible correctness of Romeo's idea, they all went up to the room, and Macbeth suggested that he should stand up in his bed, and Hamlet climb upon his shoulders to look out. The result of this movement was, that as soon as Hamlet had, after many failures, succeeded in getting upon the old man's shoulders, and was on the point of looking out, the bed gave way, and they were precipitated to the floor with a violence that shook every bone in their bodies.

"Dat what me 'spec' to happen," said the elated Romeo. "It a judgmink on you for doubtin' de only one ob de family dat eber speak de trufe."

Owing to this calamity, the version of the affair put forward by Romeo remained in doubt, but he insisted on its being accepted as a fact.

He even went so far as to declare that in the middle of the night, "when he was in de way ob sleepin' and wakin', he see sumfin' going out de winder."

Having all the truth of the family in him, this assertion ought to have carried more weight with it than it did. But while the abrasions and bumps remained on the persons who had fallen, he was stigmatised as a liar who had lured his elders on to climb up to the window, knowing that the bed would break down.

But all these speculations were of no interest to the chief actors in the more serious part of our story, for matters of great moment engaged their attention.

It was Martin who first discovered a movement in the direction of the enemy. There was a gap or rent between the castle and a projecting cliff, half-hidden by the mass of wood and bramble, and on this projection the blacksmith saw that something was moving about among the undergrowth.

He reported it to Jim, who, with the greater part of the leading boys, the members of the Council of Ten, ascended to the summit of the tower, which, with its closed side rooms, was still a matter for much speculation.

They were cautious in their movements, stooping low when they reached the summit, so as not to be seen.

Jim peered over, and was just in time to see a tall pine-tree fall. The crash of it was in a measure softened by the undergrowth, but it could be distinctly heard. There was no wind to account for it, and it puzzled all when Jim reported the fact.

It was Terry who hit upon the solution of the truth.

"Somebody cut it down," he said.

"By George!" exclaimed Jim, "you've hit it. But why?"

Martin, who was lying at full length on his side upon the roof, smoking his pipe, removed it from his lips, and said:

"They are going to rig up something to hoist up the cannon with."

There was a short silence. This announcement was portentous.

"And now I understand something I saw this morning going on below," said Felton. "I did not think it of any importance at the time. Some of those fellows were taking the rigging of a boat to pieces."

"For the pulley-blocks," said Jim.

"Will they have a rope long enough?" asked Dawson.

"They will splice it right enough," said Martin, "being sailors."

"Listen!" cried Jim.

They were silent for a while, and the sound of wood-cutting came dumbly towards them.

"If ever they get the cannon up there," said Jim, "it will be child's work hauling them into position at the back of the castle. Once there, they will pound us to pieces."

He was quiet for a moment, reflecting. Morse's mind was busy, too.

"There's the point of the first tree sticking out," said Rainstone, pointing towards the edge of the undergrowth.

Jim sent Terry for his field-glass. While he was gone, he kept his eyes on a second tree, from whence the sound of cutting seemed to come.

"What's the distance?" he asked.

"Three hundred yards," replied Martin, "if an inch."

"Our rifles, with ordinary ammunition, will carry nine hundred," said Jim.

"And so they will with mine," returned Morse.

"Get half a dozen up right away," murmured Jim; "if we cannot exactly see those fellows, we can make a pretty good guess where to aim at. I don't think they will care to work under fire."

"When will that tube be fixed on the carriage?" asked Morse, addressing Martin.

"Most of the pieces are ready. The screwing together can be done in two hours."

"Can you do it up here?"

"Certainly; but——"

"I am going to fix it here," said Morse; "it was not my original intention to do so, but circumstances alter cases. We have to meet the emergencies as they arise," he added, with a smiling glance at Jim.

"Yes," returned Jim, "and you are the fellow to meet them."

Before the rifles arrived the second tree fell with a crash. After that there was no more wood-cutting.

"They've downed all they want," said Martin, "and are now trimming and barking the trunks."

He went away to go on with his other work, and when the rifles came to hand, Jim took one and carefully loaded it. It was slow work compared to the ease with which a modern breech-loader is handled, but the weapons were good.

"There is a bush with white-tipped leaves," said Morse, who by this time had Jim's glass in his hand, "I think if you let fly there, something will come of it."

Jim took careful aim and pulled the trigger.

Practically simultaneously with the report, a man jumped up above the bush and fell in the peculiar, headlong way of one who has been shot in the breast or some adjacent part of the body.

A moment later the yelling of half a dozen voices was heard. There were answering shouts from below.

"Now, boys," said Jim, "one more round apiece. You must take your chances of hitting them."

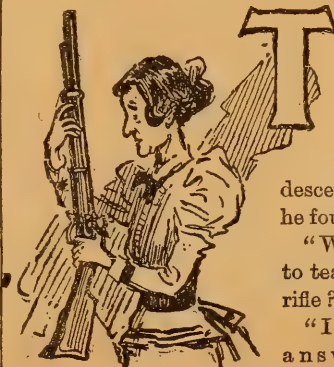
The rifles were loaded and fired, which caused a renewing of the yelling, but it did not appear that anyone was hit. Jim, with the aid of his glass, was able to detect signs of movement among the bushes, which he judged were so stirred by the dragging away of the body of the fallen man.

After that there was a time of stillness. The operations of rigging up something to raise the cannon were not resumed.

"For all that," said Morse, "we must not assume that they have abandoned the idea."

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

MISS ELEGANTINE IS DRILLED.—AN ASTOUNDING CATASTROPHE.



THE martial spirit was on Miss Elegantine. She hungered to learn how to use a rifle, and on Jim descending from the tower, he found her awaiting him.

"When will you be able to teach me the use of the rifle?" she asked.

"I fear not to-day," he answered, truthfully enough. "Our enemies are at work, and we must not relax our vigilance for a moment."

"Who, then, can take me in hand?"

"I really don't know, Miss Dibble."

Jim moved on a step, but she checked him by laying a hand upon his collar.

"It is not kind," she said, "as I am a poor, defenceless woman, completely at the mercy of any ruffian who may assail me."

"You are no worse off in that respect," said Jim, "than Mrs. Farrell or Eveline."

"Oh, but they are not so weak as I am," murmured Miss Elegantine. "My rearing was of the most delicate description."

"Well, I'm sorry I cannot attend to you to-day. Kindly ask one of the others who have more leisure. There is Rainstone."

"Does he know how to teach drilling?"

"They have all been drilled," said Jim, "and know as much as I do."

Then, as her grasp of his collar relaxed, he gently detached himself and got away.

Miss Elegantine inquired for Rainstone, and was told that he was on the ramparts. Thither she went, and he, on hearing what was required of him, declared that he was full-handed with other duties, but was sure that Terry would be delighted.

Terry was still at the top of the tower, and up the many stairs the aspiring Amazon panted. Her appearance on the summit of the tower caused considerable surprise, which was increased when she made her errand known.

Terry at once declared that he was on duty on the tower for the next two hours, and that the position was a perilous one, as firing might be expected from their foes.

"Whom, then, am I to look to?" demanded Miss Elegantine.

"There's Oscar," said Terry; "he hasn't anything particular to do, and he is as well up as any drill-sergeant in the world. He's a living wonder with his drill."

"I'll see that he does what I require," muttered Miss Elegantine. "I've got a suspicion that any of you could oblige a helpless woman, but you won't."

She hunted up her nephew, who dared not refuse her, although as a drill-master he knew he could be nothing less than a complete failure.

As a matter of fact, he was about as big a dunder-head at drilling as a boy of ordinary intelligence could be. It took a lot of hammering to get anything into his head, and when it arrived there, it never came to stay.

At each succeeding drill he had to begin all over again. What sort of rifleman he would make of his aunt may be readily guessed.

It was useless for him to remonstrate and say he was not well up. Miss Elegantine had had enough

of shirking from others, and for two hours she was in the courtyard, taking all sorts of upside down instruction from her nephew, to the lasting edification of surreptitious beholders.

"Why did you set her on to me?" Oscar ferociously demanded of Terry, as they sauntered about after dinner.

"Because I didn't want to be bothered," was the calm reply. "She is your aunt and not mine. It is your duty to look after her."

"You knew I wasn't up to drilling her," moaned Dibble, "and you mark my words, something serious will come of it."

"What do you mean?" asked Terry, startled.

"You never saw anyone handle a rifle like her," said Dibble. "I didn't remember the motion, and she loads it on peril of her life. Somehow she has got hold of a lot of cartridges. When she was ramming home the first, she kept on stopping to look down the barrel to see if it was going down the right way."

"Good heavens!"

"Even that didn't satisfy her," continued Dibble, with a moan; "but soon afterwards she rammed down another."

"Another!"

"Yes. She was not satisfied with *that*, but put in a third and a fourth. The barrel is nearly full of cartridges."

"It's madness," said Terry, really troubled.

"She's got an idea," said Dibble, gloomily, "that as many bullets as there are in a barrel, so will the number of killed be. She also thinks that all you have to do is to fire the gun, and the bullets will find the way to the man you want to shoot. It is all your fault sending her to me. You could have insisted on her doing the right thing; but what I said wasn't of any consequence. She drilled me!"

"Never mind," said Terry, consolingly—a happy thought at that moment came to his aid—"the rifle won't go off without caps."

"But she's got 'em," groaned Dibble, "and there's one on the nipple now. Anyway, there was when I left her, and she's marching about the hall and the other parts of the castle, with the rifle resting on her arm and the muzzle on a level with people's heads."

"You and your aunt make two," said Terry, savagely. "What do you mean by bringing such a dangerous old woman here?"

"Did I want her to come?" demanded Dibble.

"I don't know," returned Terry. "Go and take her gun from her."

"I am likely to get it," muttered Dibble.

Terry saw that the matter was getting beyond a joke, and he hastened off to find Jim or Morse to get their advice as to what ought to be done.

If Dibble had not exaggerated the facts—and he

was not given to exaggeration—a catastrophe was certain to come about, unless it was prevented.

If Miss Elegantine did nothing else, she would accidentally fire off the rifle, and the chances were that the barrel would burst.

Jim, on learning the facts, saw that it was a matter for prompt action, and he hastened down to the dining-hall, where he found the lady-recruit marching about with the rifle resting horizontally upon her arm. Mrs. Farrell and a number of the boys were about, all in imminent danger of having their heads blown off.

"Miss Dibble," said Jim, "may I have your rifle for a moment?"

"No," she emphatically replied, "not if I know it. I have had no end of trouble to get one and be drilled, and now that I have the means of protecting myself, when those rascals break into the castle, I do not mean to part with it."

"You really must," he said; "you have it at full cock. It is really dangerous. Look out, there!"

As most of the people in the hall now thoroughly understood that the rifle was somehow dangerous, of which they had no previous inkling, down went every head.

And it was as well they ducked, for Miss Elegantine, backing out of Jim's reach, was brought up short by the table, and convulsively grasping the trigger, pulled it down.

The rifle exploded.

Not with the usual short, sharp report, but with a roar that was doubly terrible in the confined space of the hall.

Moreover, the barrel, as Terry feared it would if the weapon were fired, burst, tearing itself off the stock, and ripping up from end to end.

The smoke filled the hall, and into the thick of it poured the three niggers from the kitchen, with Chorker at their heels. All in the courtyard attempted to rush in, but were met by those who were attempting to get out.

"Gorysmash!" roared Romeo, "what am happened?"

"Is the poor woman dead?" Mrs. Farrell was heard to ask.

"I will see in a moment," replied Jim. "Open every door and let the smoke out. Miss Dibble, are you seriously hurt?"

As the smoke cleared, he saw her lying at full length, with a bleeding face and her false front gone. He raised her head, and Mrs. Farrell came to his assistance.

"She has been struck in the face," she said, "poor thing!"

"It is only a skin wound," remarked Jim. "I fancy she is more frightened than hurt. Romeo, get some water."

The water was soon brought, and her face, having been sprinkled, Miss Elegantine opened her eyes.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, "what is the matter? Oh, I remember. That horrible gun! Where is——"

She clapped a hand to her head in search of her false front, and, finding it gone, uttered a loud scream.

"Never mind, ma'am," said Jim, soothingly, "we shall find it directly. Romeo, look for Miss Dibble's hair."

"What is the use of looking," sobbed she, "when it is all scorched off my poor head? Don't trouble to look for it, Romeo. It will be a waste of time. After all," she added, with an innocent smile, "*it will grow again.*"

She took a handkerchief off her neck and tied it over her head. Then Jim assisted her to a chair.

"That wretched gun!" she murmured. "What made it go off?"

"I am afraid you pulled the trigger," replied Jim.

Romeo had by this time picked up the pieces, which, with much rolling of eyes, he showed to Jim.

Dibble at this moment came strolling into the hall, feigning to do it casually. He had heard of the catastrophe, with the addition that his aunt had blown her head off. He just dropped in to see if it were true.

She espied him instantly, and beckoned for him to approach her. He came diffidently enough, conscious that other eyes were upon him. Jim, to spare Dibble's feelings, motioned to the negroes and Chorker not to wait.

"I think," he said to Miss Elegantine, "that we may leave you now. You have something to say to Dibble."

She would have remonstrated against their going, but the hint from Jim was enough, and all but Mrs. Farrell departed.

"Oscar," said Miss Elegantine, "do you not feel sorry now?"

Dibble was surprised. He was sorry, of course; but the tone and manner of his aunt implied that he was to blame for what had happened.

"Look at me," she went on. "Not a hair of my head left; *all singed off!*"

Dibble stared.

"Do you not feel that, if you had been a better boy, this would not have happened?"

"I don't see how I could help it, aunt," said Dibble, rebelliously.

"Don't talk to me!" she cried. "After all I have done for you, to come to this! Go away!"

Dibble felt both hot and indignant. How could he possibly be to blame in the matter?

"It wasn't my fault," he said. "You hadn't any right with the gun, aunt," he insisted.

Her amazement reduced her to speechlessness. She waved him off, and he sullenly walked away. When he was near the door, he happened to look under the table, and there he espied the lost front. He cast a backward glance at his aunt. She was looking the other way. Of Mrs. Farrell he took no heed. It was the work of a moment, and he had the wig in his possession.

"Go about bald as long as you live!" he muttered, as he thrust the front under his jacket. "Blow it! I'm getting sick of being bullied and worried about things I haven't done."

It certainly was exasperating, but his revenge was a very bitter one. What he did with the wig must be recorded anon.

Shortly after his departure, Mrs. Farrell left the hall, and then Miss Elegantine searched for her lost treasure. Of course, she could not find it, and the conviction that it had been burnt to nothing by the powder of the gun came upon her.

"It is a horrible fix," she muttered; "and not a hairdresser on this benighted island. All this comes of having a nephew and a fool of a doctor who sent me abroad for my health. I should like to kill the pair of them!"

With sundry angry jerks of her body, she, too, vanished, and all that was left of her recent performance was the broken stock, the rent barrel, and five bullets that had been flattened against the stone wall, on the floor.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

CHORKER THINKS HE WILL FOLLOW A BAD EXAMPLE.—
MORSE'S LAST INVENTION.



IT was night, and the trio of niggers sat round their kitchen fire. One white man was in their company on sufferance. It was Chorker.

He had to bear himself in a becoming manner in the company in which he found himself. Once upon a time he had looked down on niggers, but, in the whirligig of time, they had come to look down upon him.

"You was a-sayin', Mister Romeo," said Chorker, "that in your belief the master and them two under ones got out of your bedroom winder?"

"I say dat," said "Mr." Romeo, loftily, "and it am de trufe. You got anyting to say to de contrairy opposite?"

"No; I shouldn't take the liberty, Mister Romeo," said the all too humble Chorker. "What I wanted to get at is, how did they do it?"

"Let theirselves down wif a rope, Mister Tick-head."

"Oh, that was the way?" rejoined Chorker, placidly accepting his new cognomen. "I see. Let theirselves down, did they?"

"They did," said Romeo.

Macbeth and Hamlet shook their heads doubtfully, but declined to take any verbal part in a discussion between Romeo and Chorker.

"Now, as to the fixin' of that 'ere rope, now?" continued Chorker. "I ain't got your brains, Mister Romeo."

Romeo was flattered, but he was not going to show it.

"Dat no news to me," he said. "'Bout fixin' de rope, now, dat a chile's job."

He took up the poker and held it horizontally.

"See dat, now?"

Chorker saw it, and was, to all appearances, much edified.

"Say dat you put him 'cross de winder. Den you tie de rope to de middle and t'row him out. You git out and slide down. Dere you am outside safely sound."

"I shouldn't have thought of that in ten years," said Chorker, perspiring with admiration and gratitude.

"Not habin' de brains," remarked Romeo, complacently.

"Dat not de way old Nap shunt off," said Macbeth, tartly.

"What oder way he go, den?" demanded Romeo.

"He not go dat way. Whar de poker he leab behin' him?"

"He not take dis poker. Mos' likeler, a stick."

"Whar de stick, den?"

"Dey all hang on de rope an' break him t'rough."

Romeo spoke as one given to solving problems off-hand. Chorker, who saw the flaw in the story, finding it filled up in this way, was more than satisfied. He reeked with admiration as he rose to his feet.

"I didn't think there was sich a quantity of brains in any man's head. You ought to be in London, making your fortune. Good-night, Mister Romeo. Good-night, gentlemen."

They all responded with graciousness, and he left them, not to go to bed, as they thought, but to look up some bits of rope to piece together, for he was bent on emulating the fictitious story of the school-master's escape.

He argued with himself that sooner or later the invading band of men would get into the castle. Then his fate was almost certain. He would be sacrificed with the rest. But to be in the woods, though perilous to an extent, offered him an extra chance of escape. Therefore was he resolved to seize the first opportunity to get away.

But first of all he must make preparations. A bundle of clothes, a store of food, and some other things, were absolutely essential.

Leaving him to carry on his secret labours, we will return to the top of the tower, where Martin, surrounded by some score of the boys, was busy putting together the carriage that Morse had ordered.

He worked by the light of a dark lantern alone, for it was the desire of the inventor that there should be nothing to indicate to the enemy that anything was in preparation. The light, if seen at all from the beach, would only be the faintest phosphorescent glow, which would give no clue to the work being carried on.

The hammer was not needed. It was simply a matter of putting bolts through and screwing on the nuts. With a little oil this was done with so little noise that the quietude of the night was scarcely broken.

When put together, it was something like an iron windlass without the rope. On the centre bar rested the tube, and over it was a band, which, being fastened down with screws, held it in its place.

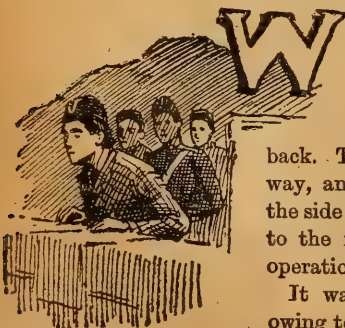
The different elevations of the tube were obtained by turning a handle, and security of position was effected with a catch, of the class one sees in the hoisting-gear of cranes.

When Martin, in a whisper, declared all was ready, Morse tested it, and declared it admirably answered his purpose.

"And now," he said, "we will test its utility."

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

CONFUSION TO THE ENEMY.—ANOTHER RESPITE.



WITH a motion of his hand, Morse signified that he wished all but himself to stand back. They drew out of his way, and he peered over the side of the tower nearest to the field of the enemy's operations.

It was a darkish night, owing to a filmy mist hiding the stars above, but the air near the ground was clear.

His object was to make out the exact spot he was about to operate upon.

"Jim," he said, softly.

Jim came over to his side, and Morse pointed downwards.

"Do you see anything there?" he asked.

"Is it a light?"

"I think it is. If so, those fellows have taken advantage of the darkness to go on with their labours."

"Then we must give them another peppering," said Jim.

"Let me have a shot at them first," Morse calmly suggested.

Close by where he was standing were two long sticks lying on the roof of the tower. Each had a bundle of oblong shape, giving them a crude resemblance to extra-size rockets. He took up one and fixed it in the tube, wherein it lay loosely.

"Now all may come to see the effect," he said; "keep your eyes open and watch the results. What one may miss another may be able to detect."

He added a caution for none to tread upon the other rocket, and, with the caution inspired by a knowledge of Morse and his inventions, they drew up.

With great care, Morse lowered the tube until the mouth of it pointed downwards. The rocket in it showed a tendency to slip, and he lightly fixed it by stuffing in a piece of rag. Then, with all the care of an experienced gunner, he proceeded to take aim, raising and lowering the tube until he had got it to his satisfaction.

"Ready now," he said, as he lighted a match and applied it to the lower end of the oblong tip of the rocket.

He drew it away, leaving a spark glowing for a moment or two. The boys held their breath.

Whir!

With a rush that forcibly reminded the spectators of the speeding of a rocket at some grand display of fireworks at home, the missile flew upon its errand.

Down straight to the spot where the enemy was supposed to be at work it flew, plunging into the bushes.

A shout of surprise showed that the enemy *was* there, and while it echoed round the castle there was an explosion as of a secret mine.

"True as steel," cried Morse, with a shout of exultation.

His companions cheered, and as their voices died away they heard the cries of the enemy, some in pain, and others in terror and despair. There must have been at least thirty of them on that knoll of earth jutting out from the cliff.

"It seems to have scattered them," said Martin.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



As they drew near the Castle, she looked up at its dark outline. There was no light, no sign of life, nothing to indicate that their advance was suspected.

"I'm blessed if you don't give us a fresh surprise every time."

"I have merely improved on the old-fashioned rocket," modestly answered Morse. "I had better give them another. It will complete the work of to-night."

Amid the breathless silence of the lookers-on, he placed the second rocket in the tube. The cries were still to be heard from the cliff, and a murmuring from lower down. Then, after assuring himself that the tube had not been shifted, he discharged it with as good an aim as the first.

The outcry continued, dying away as those who survived retreated.

"Some of them," said Morse, "will not complain. The rest will have to travel a long way round to get to a spot where they can descend."

"How's that?" asked Martin.

"I reckon," replied Morse, "that they had fixed up gear to go up and down by themselves as well as to hoist the cannon. I will undertake to say that all that gear is hopelessly wrecked, and buried under the *débris* of the projecting part of the cliff."

"What explosive did you use?" asked Jim, wonderingly.

"Dynamite," said Morse, "as strong as it can be made. It has a downward action, you will remember. It will not have failed in its mission to blow away the soft soil by the bushes. That bit of ground had to go."

In the gloom of night they could not verify this assertion, but he was generally so very careful in what he said, never considering a thing done until he had worked it out in figures or seen it, that they could not doubt him.

"It is a marvellous feat," said Terry, breathing hard.

And that was the opinion of them all.

"The works are closed for the night," said Morse, grimly, "so now all that are inclined may go to bed."

The lights had vanished from the cliff, the cries had died away. Truly the work and the lives of five of the foe had come to an end. Three lay buried under the fallen soil, the other two were on their backs on the verge of a huge ragged rent in the ground, with their sightless eyes fixed blankly on the misty sky.

Among the survivors there was a panic, and acting on the first impulse they fled towards the chine.

It was a sorry tale they had to tell to their leader, a woman whose passionate nature could not endure the thought of being foiled by enemies, who were but boys.

CHAPTER CXL.

THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT.—THE BURIED CANNON.



LUCIA DI VALO was lying in her tent, dreamily smoking a cigarette, when the first rocket was fired by Morse. In the deep resonance of the report she read the fact that something out of the common had happened.

Springing to her feet, she hastened out of the tent, and found all the

men there were astir.

"What is the cause of that report?" she asked one, as he ran up to her.

"It came from the cliff, *senorita*," he answered, "and there has been a rushing down of the soil."

"Then something serious has happened?"

"An earthquake."

"You fool!" she said, curtly. "An earthquake would have been *felt* more than heard."

The men made way for her as she stepped quickly out of the shadows of the tent into the open. They followed her, and were in the nick of time to witness the second explosion.

The avalanche of stones and earth that followed rattled portentously in their ears, and the cries of the men above sounded ominously.

Two men, who had been engaged in hoisting at the base of the cliff, came tearing towards Lucia, their faces, though dimly seen, startling in their expression of alarm.

"*Senorita*," they cried, "a star from heaven fell and rent the earth above. As it descended Peitro was buried alive. We had but a narrow escape."

"Stars do not fall from heaven," said Lucia, contemptuously. "It is something from those daringimps of the castle. Have you forgotten already how they rent up yonder path? The cannon—is it in position?"

"We hoisted it up, five of us," was the reply, "and we two, with Peitro, then sent two of our number aloft to help with the work there. They were near the summit when the explosion came."

"And they fell?" groaned Lucia.

"It is to be feared so, *senorita*."

"You are not sure?"

"No, for a confusion fell upon us."

"I wish I had a hundred women instead of you men," muttered Lucia. "You have no more nerve

"I'm blessed if you don't give us a fresh surprise every time."

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"It is to be feared so, *senorita*."

"You are not sure?"

"No, for a confusion fell upon us."

"I wish I had a hundred women instead of you men," muttered Lucia. "You have no more nerve

than babes. What mattered an explosion? You should have kept your wits about you."

"We are not all so blessed as the *senorita*," muttered the man.

She was further told that the hoisting-gear had been wrecked, and was lying, for the most part, under the *débris* that had fallen.

"And what of the men above?" she asked. "Vamos, has nothing been heard of him?"

"Nothing," the man said. In his fright he had not even heard the cries of those who fled after the explosion.

Lucia was troubled, but she knew the value of calmness as an influencing factor, and as she turned back towards her tent, said:

"When he returns send him into me."

"Will he ever return?" was the question the men asked themselves.

But Vamos was not yet dead. In something over an hour he presented himself before Lucia, bedraggled, soil-stained, weary, and distraught.

He signalled his arrival outside by calling to her by name.

"*Senorita Lucia*."

"Enter," she said, and he obeyed, coming just within the tent, and there halting.

"What has happened?" she asked, sharply.

"The young fiends," he answered, "fired some huge rocket from the castle, and it exploded in the midst of us."

"What loss?" was her next query.

"Two that were with me, and two that were being hoisted up from below."

"Dead?"

"All dead."

Lucia was silent for a moment, sitting with her hand veiling her eyes. Vamos stood quietly, waiting for her to speak again. Presently she looked up.

"Any other loss?"

"The apparatus is wrecked."

"Yes; what more? You have something else to tell me."

"The gun we were getting into position went down with the avalanche, and lies buried, for aught I know, fifty feet deep."

"And a simple explosion did all this?" said Lucia, half-incredulously.

"It was an explosion that split the ground," Vamos replied, "and happening somewhat near the edge of the cliff, the earth bulged out and fell."

"How did you get here?"

"We had to travel as far as the edge of the chine yonder, and there we slid down as best we could. Behold my dress!"

"I see," she said, carelessly. "To-morrow the lost gun must be found."

"How, *senorita*?" asked Vamos

"Dig it out."

"*Senorita*, we have no spades."

"*Scratch* it out, then!" she answered, bitterly.

"What men you are to let such trifles daunt you!"

"A tenth of our men lost, and not a blow struck, *senorita*."

"If I," cried Lucia, springing to her feet, "were all that is left of us, I would then not budge, but hold on to the last! A handful of boys is all you have to contend with. The master is a booby; the other men children."

Vamos bowed mechanically.

"The will of the *senorita* is law."

"A law that must be obeyed," she rejoined, sharply. "If there are any malcontents bring them to me. They grumble, I suppose?"

"They say we have come upon an errand that will end in disaster."

"Go and get some rest," said Lucia. "And let all the men muster early in the morning, when I will speak to them."

And with a wave of her tapering hand she dismissed him.

CHAPTER CXLI.

ANOTHER MISSING MAN.—SHELLING THE CAMP.



It was observed by Romeo on the following morning that Chorker had never before been so assiduous or brisk in his labours. Up to

that time he had shown a tendency to lag and skulk on the least provocation, and many a hard word

and an occasional missile had been thrown at his head.

But on this especial morning he worked like a modern Hercules, cleaning, and dusting, and rushing about as if doing domestic work for a wager.

"Whar am de marrer wif de man?" said Macbeth. All three noted how assiduous was Chorker.

"Sumfin' gone wrong in him head," said Hamlet, significantly. "No man in him senses eber toil in dat way."

"Neber," said Romeo.

Chorker, who had a minute before rushed out of the kitchen with a broom, now reappeared with it, panting and blowing like a grampus.

"Done the scullery," he said, "and now, by the leave of you gentlemen, I'll take a few minutes' rest."

No objection was raised to this suggestion, as it was the hour when the three niggers partook of luncheon. Chorker, to their surprise, refused to partake of any.

"I'll jest stroll out," he said, "and git a mouthful of fresh air."

"He clean gone—dementled," said Macbeth, as Chorker vanished.

But Chorker was as sane and sensible as ever. He had a set purpose in his mind, and, by hastening to finish the ordinary morning's work, he had a most convenient hour to carry it out.

Chorker was going to clear away. He had his clothing ready, and package of food and the rope, also a short, stout stick wherewith to secure that rope to the window.

With the trio of niggers safe in the kitchen at luncheon, he was able to convey all these things up to their bedroom.

There he was so far, and now arose the question, how was he to get up to the window? There was Macbeth's bed, and three boxes containing the odds and ends of property belonging to the occupants of the room. By piling these on the bed he thought he could do it.

Yes, they sufficed. He could from the summit of the boxes just get his head above the window-sill.

His first care was to drop his bundle of clothes and package of food out. That done, he made an effort to raise himself up so as to get out of the window, and descend.

The rope was lowered and the stick placed across the open window.

"Strong enough to bear a hoss," he muttered.

His next move was to spring up, and in the attempt he shot the three boxes down. They fell with a thunderous roar upon the ground.

Alarmed, he loosened his hold upon the window-sill and followed them to the floor; there he lay, with the sensation of having his head split, and his eyes giving out small volcanic eruptions.

But the chief feeling on him, however, was the terror of discovery. Had the owners of those boxes heard the uproar? In case they had, he crept under Macbeth's bed, and lay there quaking for a quarter of an hour.

Nobody coming, he stole out again, and once more placed the boxes in position. But the fall had shaken him up, and he did it nervously.

Using the greatest precaution, he eventually got upon the window-sill, and grasping the rope, lowered himself out, feeling uncommonly quaky as he thought of the forty feet below.

But now that he was out he tried to nerve himself, and began the descent, going very carefully, and

descending inch by inch, scraping his feet against the wall to act as a brake.

Suddenly it occurred to him that the rope was moving without his aid. Looking up, he beheld a sight that turned him cold. It was the face of Romeo at the window, and the hands of that grinning personage were shaking it.

"What yer doing?" cried Chorker.

"So you run away, too," said Romeo. "How slow you go! Look out! Me going to help you to get to de bottom quicker."

One of his hands disappeared and speedily reappeared, grasping a knife. The eyes of Chorker seemed to turn right round in his head with terror.

"For mercy's sake," he gasped, "don't cut!"

"Bound to do it," coolly responded Romeo. "What bisness you got to bolt?"

"I'll come back again!" groaned Chorker.

"No, you won't," replied Romeo. "If you do, me see dat you get a tanning for it. Mobe a lilly bit quicker dere."

"I'm agoing!" moaned Chorker, as he began to slide down at a rate that threatened to skin the palms of his hands.

He was within about ten feet of the ground, when he felt himself rushing down. A cry rose to his lips, but ere he could utter it he came, with a fearful bump, to the ground, and it ended in nothing more than a gasping "Oh!" the rope falling upon him.

"You blamed fool!" he roared, a moment later, "what did yer cut the rope for?"

"Fun!" said Romeo, as he detached the stick from the window and threw it down. "Clar off, or it be de wuss for you. Hear me talking, does you?"

"You are a ijiotic skunk!" growled Chorker,

"All right," returned Romeo, "me gib you an answer to dat when we meet agin. *If you lib to return alibe.*"

Romeo's face disappeared, and Chorker, now doubtful if he had taken a wise step, heard him move the boxes back to their original position.

"There's no goin' back," he muttered, "unless I can git up some yarn about havin' been out to scout the henemy. But even with that I durstn't show for a day or two."

Discontented, and filled with many throes of fear, he strode away into the wood, his departure signalled by a firing from the summit of the tower.

Inspecting the spot where Morse had sent his rockets the previous evening, Jim discovered many infallible signs of the completeness of the work.

The bulging portion of the cliff had vanished, and much of the undergrowth further in was destroyed.

The trees cut down had disappeared, and so had the hoisting apparatus, as the reader has already been informed.

"You ought to be satisfied," said Jim to Morse.

"So far I am," he replied. "My next move will be to shell the camp below."

He called his rocket-firing shelling, and no doubt it had something of that nature in it. That was the task he was engaged upon when Chorker vanished into the wood.

Surrounded by an admiring group of friends, Morse fired his first shell. Down it rushed hissing and screaming, but when it was still a hundred feet from the camp it burst.

"I was afraid of that," he said; "the fuse of the rest must be altered.

He had four more left, and he intimated that he would rather do the work of altering the fuses alone.

"It is a habit I've got into. The presence of other people makes me nervous. Go down to the ramparts, and, Jim, you might kill the time by seeing what our friends are doing."

"They are buzzing about like a lot of bees," said Jim, who had been watching them through his glass.

He closed it, and with the rest, a score or so of men and boys, went down to the ramparts.

"I like the idea of Morse being nervous," remarked Felton.

"What is there in that?" asked Martin.

"He is as brave as a lion."

"So he may be, and yet nervous. Nervousness is only another term for sensitiveness. A nervous man when he gets over the first shock is very often a man of steel."

"That is true enough," said Sleery, the carpenter. "I had a brother-in-law whom we all thought a coward, even his sister, my poor wife who is dead and gone. She used to say that her brother hadn't an ounce of pluck in him, and when he 'listed we all asked how long it would be before he deserted. None of us ever dreamt he would fight."

"And did he?" asked Jim, as he surveyed the disturbed camp below.

"He fought against the hill tribes in India," said Sleery, "and for doing something uncommonly brave—saved some officers' lives at the risk of his own—he got the Victoria Cross."

"I can well believe it," said Martin.

"That lot below," said Jim, "doesn't know what to make of the shells. They are looking up here as if in expectation of another."

"Which they will get in due time," said Felton; "there it goes!"

Morse could not have wasted much time in altering the fuses. The second shell pitched right over the camp into one of the boats near the shore, exploding as it struck.

When the smoke had cleared away, as it did rapidly, not a vestige of the boat was to be seen.

And the occupants of the camp were tearing towards the cliff for shelter. Jim noted this through the glass, by the aid of which he could see the very expression of terror on the faces of the men.

"Shall we go up again?" suggested Terry.

"No," replied Jim. "Morse, if he wanted us, would have called. Perhaps he prefers being alone."

There were three more shells to fire, and their departure was waited for with breathless interest.

Presently a shot was fired and pitched right into the heart of the camp, bowling over one of the tents, and shooting ahead to the verge of the sea, where it exploded.

"Improving," muttered Jim. "Morse will get one right home presently."

There was a delay of ten minutes ere the next was fired, and it went almost direct to the mark, striking the ground on the verge of the camp, and, exploding, it tore a tent to fragments, in addition to scooping out a deep hole, twenty feet across, in the sand.

"What is the idea of shooting now?" asked Rainstone.

"To wreck the stores of the enemy," replied Jim. "Morse did not tell me so, but I judge that is his aim."

The last shell was fired, and it found a home right in the heart of the camp, where it burst, and scattered the tents and stores in every direction.

Only three of the tents remained erect, and one of them belonged to Lucia di Valo.

There was a great cheering from the ramparts, but it ceased suddenly when a woman was seen to emerge from a tent. It was Lucia di Valo.

She stood for a moment looking up towards the castle. Then, with a gesture of contempt, she slowly walked across the open ground between the wrecked camp and the cliff, and disappeared.

"Plucky," said Martin.

"A woman's bravado," said Sleery.

"Whatever it is," remarked Jim, as he closed the glass, "she will gain her point, and that is to obtain unswerving influence over her men. They fled, she remained, and her coolness will inspire them. As I said once before, there is all the courage of a Joan of Arc in her."

"And like the ancient Joan," said Morse, as he emerged from the entrance to the tower, "she will have to succumb to a superior power."

"I think we shall win the day, but there is a lot to be done yet. By the way," he added, in an undertone, "I forgot to feed the lions this morning."

His words went no further than Jim's ear, and he at once volunteered to go to the three exiles hiding in the cave.

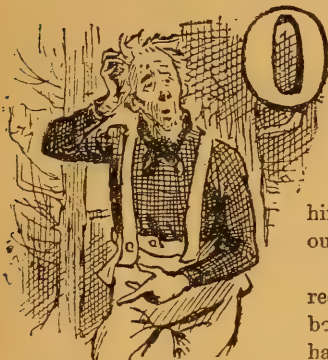
"Not a bit of it," said Morse. "Let them wait till

after dinner. A little wholesome fasting will do them good."

Morse said this in a jesting spirit, but if he had known what was likely to result from his delaying taking the rations to the schoolmasters, he might have seriously thought of doing it at once. But, with all his talent, Morse was not endowed with second-sight, or the power of diving into the future.

CHAPTER CXLII.

CHORKER GRAVITATES TOWARDS OLD ACQUAINTANCES.



ON getting into the wood, where the shelter of the trees gave him a sense of security, Chorker stopped for a time to bethink himself on the road he ought to take.

The comparatively recent shooting of the boys in that quarter had driven away the

wild game, and the place was a solitude. Hogs are as cunning creatures as one can find anywhere, and they know when danger is in the air. They feel that the scent of powder indicates danger, even if they have never previously nosed it.

Now Chorker had no intention to go far away.

It was his firm belief that in a very short time the enemy would be in the castle, "settling that lot," as he mentally put it; and having done that, they would naturally go away jubilant and satisfied.

Then he would have what was left of the castle and the island to himself.

His proper course, then, would be to hover in the neighbourhood, and the cave in the chine came back to his memory.

It was a good hiding-place, handy to sleep in on account of the comparative warmth; and then there was the farm not so far away, where he knew many succulent tubers and other things eatable had been perforce left in the ground. Anything so left in that climate did not rot as it generally does at home, but is kept in a state of preservation until the warm weather comes again, and then, in due course, it sprouts and grows again.

It was clear to him that he must make for the cave.

At the outside it would take him two hours to reach it. The way was rugged, but hard to be mis-

taken. He would not lose himself, like an overgrown babe in the wood.

So to the cave he wended his way, and in due time arrived at it.

On entering he was amazed to find three blanket-beds not far from the mouth, and in the blankets he recognised a portion of the property of the school.

For a brief spell he was utterly dumbfounded by this discovery.

Then light broke in upon him.

"It's them three levanting varmint's of school-masters," he muttered; "but what's come of 'em?"

Had they been fallen upon and devoured by wild beasts?

Hardly, for nothing wild and sufficiently ferocious had ever been seen on the island.

Were they out for a walk, or had they gone into the depths of the cave?

He was musing on the possibility of their having done so, sitting down with his eyes wandering about the chine, when he saw them returning from the direction of the farm.

They were coming along in a cautious, sneaky kind of way, each man carrying a bundle, which Chorker rightly guessed was farm-produce.

The fact was they had had no breakfast, owing to the forgetfulness of Morse, whose mind was fixed on more important matters; and Mr. Farrell, remembering the adjacent farm, suggested that they should go thither to procure something to sustain life.

"Here's a find!" muttered Chorker; "and what am I to make of it?"

Face the three men whom he had so shabbily treated on a previous occasion he dared not; retreat from the cave he would not. His best course, evidently, was to hie away into its interior, to a sufficient distance to be out of the way of being seen, and there await the issue of events.

But he was not going without the means of making himself comfortable.

So he picked out two of the warmest blankets, kicked the rest of the things about, and beat a retreat.

Halting fifty yards down, he watched for the return of the men.

They soon came stealing in, and their eyes fell upon their disordered bedding. A moment later they had discovered the loss of a portion of it.

He could hear every word they said, for the cave transmitted sounds with the facility of a speaking-tube.

They were terrified beyond description, fearing that some human foe had been there.

But the idea was given up, and they talked of a wild hog having visited the cave to worry, in sheer playfulness or mischief, their private property.

That would not do, however, for wild hogs would neither eat blankets nor carry them away.

Finally Mr. Farrell offered a solution of the mystery.

"It is the boy Morse," he said; "he has been here and, angry at our absence, has taken away the blankets."

It was a feeble suggestion, but they were feeble men, and it found acceptance. Morse, they decided, it must be.

Chorker was considerably taken aback to find that Morse knew where these men were in hiding, and then he wondered how the boy could communicate with them, being shut up in a castle, practically besieged.

While he was worrying his mental faculties with this problem, he saw a light some distance down the cave. It was drawing nearer, and, believing rightly that it was carried by Morse, he looked, or rather groped, about for a hiding-place.

It was his last wish to meet with anyone from the castle, but there was no retreating, as he would gladly have done. He was fortunate in finding a rough recess in the wall of the cave, into which he crept and rolled himself up in the blankets, which were of a dark grey colour, and not easily discernible to the eye in the gloom.

He left one small hole to peep out of, and presently saw Morse with a rush-basket filled with food, go by.

Morse entertained no suspicions of the neighbourhood of Chorker, but passed on with his eyes straight ahead.

Thrusting his head out so as to hear what was said, Chorker was astonished to find that no complaint was made to him about the missing blankets. The reticence of the masters arose from their fear of offending him.

All that passed between them was a sort of apology from Morse for being late, and the excuse of pressing matters that kept him in the castle. Then he came back again, passed the skulking Chorker, and hastened on by the way he came.

The desire to know how he could go to and fro took possession of Chorker, and, yielding to it, he got up, pulled off his boots, and stealthily followed the young chemist.

It was an amazingly long journey to him, but he observed one thing that made him easy about getting back again. There were diverging passages, but they were all on the right hand. Therefore, all he had to do was to keep his right hand upon the wall, left side going, on his right returning, and he could not lose his way.

With complete success he tracked Morse to the foot of the flight of steps that led to the laboratory,

and stopping there, heard him raise and let fall the trapdoor above.

"That 'ere door is in the castle," muttered Chorker; "now, I wonders where it is, what part on it?"

He dared not attempt to inspect it then, for it was daytime, but it could be done at night.

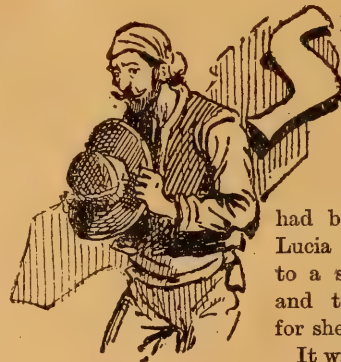
And what a vista of temporary comfort it opened up to him! He was quite independent of that party at the mouth of the cave, for he could steal into the castle in the night-time, obtain the supplies he needed, and return to his lair.

For the better security of himself against discovery he would take up his abode in the first diverging passage of the cave.

"And, maybe," he thought, "I'll have a bit of a game with some on 'em that they've orfen had with me. Blow it! my turn's come. I can run agin the 'ole lot—Nap, his two assistants, them boys, them niggers, and the wimen folks. I've read of people gittin' theirselves up as ghosts and skeering others into fits; I'll do it. Here's a chance of paying off old scores!"

CHAPTER CXLIII.

AN ASSAULT ON THE CASTLE.



"SENORITA," said Vamos, "it cannot be done."

In the night such fragments of camping material as were left to them had been transported by Lucia di Valo's followers to a spot under the cliff, and there put together for shelter.

It was a singular thing, but the tent of the woman leader was the only one that had entirely escaped injury. It had not been struck or torn—a fact she was to make great capital out of.

"Not be done?" she said, as she turned upon her seat and looked him in the face.

"Not within reasonable time, senorita. Without tools it will be the work of weeks. The men's knives are being spoiled by putting them to such use."

"Let it be, then," she answered, impatiently; "from the first I had no faith in such cumbrous tools. It was the suggestion of that wretched idiot, Don Carlos Spartola."

"There is yet one left," hinted Vamos, who preferred battering the castle to pieces from the distance, to closer warfare.

"Where is it?"

"Half-buried in the sands yonder."

"There let it lie. Call the men together."

It was the evening hour, and as the band assembled before the tent in obedience to a quiet call from Vamos, their faces were heavy with gloom. They were getting dispirited—not from their losses alone, but from a growing conviction that the task they were engaged upon would end in failure and disaster.

Lucia was some minutes coming out, and when she did it was suddenly from the tent with two quick steps and then a halt. She did everything for effect, knowing that it was necessary to impress the men, and get them to rely upon her to lead them to victory.

With her spare, graceful form erect, and eyes flashing, she was a fascinating figure. Her beauty had an especial charm—no mean factor in the case—and instantly there was a change in the men. Their lassitude and depression fled, and, doffing their hats, they gave utterance to a series of cries that passed among them for cheering.

"Senors," she said, "we came here for a purpose, and it must be fulfilled. On your courage, which I know is great, I rely."

Again they cried out, and waved their caps and hats, which were of a mixed nationality.

"We have met with some minor impediments," she resumed, "but what army does not? It is well they have come at the outset. Is there not an old adage, 'Lose first, win last'?"

"It is so, *senorita*!" they cried.

"Why, then," she demanded, "do I see gloomy faces? Are you men to be easily disheartened, or is it for me you fear?"

No answer. They looked a bit hang-dog, and she changed her tone to one of cheerful rallying.

"You must not be tender-hearted for my sake," she said. "I am proof against bullet and knife. I know that I shall lead you on to victory. Look at my tent—unharméd, untouched, while none other has escaped. I carry a charm that will help me and save you, if you will only be faithful to me."

"We will—we swear it!" they cried.

"To-night," she resumed, "we must take a bold step. Though the path is blocked for cannon it is free to us. Surely you have courage enough to meet those children?"

The bitter sarcasm conveyed in the tone of her voice had an exasperating effect upon the men. They drew their knives, and, with muttered imprecations, swore that they would give a good account of themselves that night.

"*Senorita*," they cried, "command us, and we will do your bidding."

"At midnight, then," she said, "I will lead you up yonder, and he who lags shall die. I swear it!"

It was her proud, imperious way of doing things—to hold them with a threatening hand with as little soft speaking as possible. She knew the men. To pat them on the back, or to cry "Well done," would in their eyes be a sign of weakness. The only ruling they felt obliged to obey was that of the iron rod.

But few of their number had any stomach for the work ahead of them. The rockets sent down by Morse upon the cliff and into the camp had exercised a terrifying effect upon their nerves. Living in the beggarly little island of Minorca, they saw but little of the late inventions of those who provide us with the material for war. In that sense they had not got beyond the gunpowder age.

So it fell out that, though so very brave and bursting with promised valour in the presence of their woman leader, they were somewhat subdued as soon as she left them.

"They are not boys," they muttered; "she only tells us so to give us heart. They are men up there, and devils to boot."

"Whatever they may be," said Vamos, "you will have to fight. Do you think the *senorita* would take the trouble to lie to you, dogs that you are?"

"We may be dogs," they answered, surlily, "but a dog clings to life as well as the lion."

Vamos could not dispute this obvious truism, and merely bade them rest during the part of the day that was left to them, and they rested as such men do, lying about, smoking, gambling, and occasionally quarrelling.

Lucia di Valo did not show herself again to her followers until the hour appointed was at hand. Then she came out of her tent, ready armed for the prospective fight.

The young moon had not set, but it was low in the sky, with a mist about it. The stars overhead were dimmed by the vapours. But still there was light enough for men to see their way.

Vamos, as lieutenant, had mustered the men with the command for all to be silent, as the voice travelled a long way in the stillness of night. They were as quiet as so many mice, save for a slight clicking sound at intervals, originating in the chattering of teeth in the heads of a few of the more cowardly ones.

They were well armed, but they had not rifles for all. About a third had to rely on the revolver and knife.

"Have we no hammers?" asked Lucia, softly.

The answer, given by Vamos, was in the negative.

"We did not know there would be a use for them," he explained.

"Bah!" exclaimed Lucia, angrily, "it is little you know at any time. You must use the butts of your rifles to break down the gates of the castle."

She marched on ahead to the foot of the path that had been destroyed, and began the ascent. It was the only possible road to take, and it required all the skill

of a mountaineer to surmount the many difficulties of the ascent.

Too well had Morse done his work. Not only was the path torn to chaotic masses, but it had been piled up in every conceivable variety of jagged confusion. Then there were the trees lying about in all varieties of destruction, some split or rent, with ragged edges that were bad to come against in the gloom.

The way up was a great trial to the men. So long, that what was ordinarily the work of a few minutes—it used to be no more to the fleet-footed boys—took them nearly an hour.

With all their care, many received minor injuries from the splintered tree-trunks, and one had to be left behind with an injured foot. But the rest followed the silent, determined woman, come to avenge a lover who had richly earned his fate.

As they drew near the castle, she looked up at its dark outline. There was no light, no sign of life, nothing to indicate that their advance was suspected.

Apparently she had everything as if she had arranged it for her purpose.

CHAPTER CXLIV.

NOT SO SLEEPY AFTER ALL.—A DESPERATE AFFRAY.



At length Lucia di Valo came to a stop. She stood on the summit of the old path on a level with the castle. *Vamos* was close behind her. She motioned to him to come up nearer to her, and he came up.

"A dozen of the strongest men," she whispered. "Set them at the gates. A few blows with the butts of their rifles ought to beat in that rotten timber-work."

Vamos had his doubts, but he was there to obey, and backing among the crowd of men in the rear, he laid a hand upon one and motioned for him to go forward. The man obeyed with the feelings of a soldier in the old days who was selected to lead a forlorn hope and strongly objected to it.

But he received no intimation of the work he was required to do until the rest of the chosen men came up one by one. Then Lucia motioned to them to go forward.

"Beat in yon gates," she said, "as many as can stand in a line, and let your blows fall together. Tinkering will do nothing."

The men moved on with assumed alacrity, but there was some manœuvring among them to force others into an honourable front place. They reached the bridge and halted. Though appointed to this duty there was no leader among them. It was a mistake on the part of Lucia di Valo not appointing one.

"Go on!" she exclaimed, impatiently.

The men had no time to answer, for the words had barely left her lips when one of the cannon posted inside the portcullis was fired, and a ringing shout was heard from the battlements. Half of the twelve selected men fell, and scattered shots played havoc with as many more among the main body.

The roar of the cannon was succeeded by a volley from young riflemen posted above. But either from the elevated nature of their position, or inability to take aim in the gloom, very little execution was done.

The attacking party was staggered, dumbfounded. The half-dozen of the forward party left alive, rushed back in alarm until they were checked by the screech of fury that burst from Lucia's lips.

"Back to your work, you curs!" she cried. "Lead them on, *Vamos*. Where are your weapons, you in the rear? Shoot the young dogs above!"

The men blazed away wildly for a minute or two, showing a tendency at the same time to back out of the fray. Lucia, using terms of address happily rarely heard from woman's tongue, urged them to remain.

But, in the midst of her tirade, the dismayed horde of Spaniards and half-castes were assailed from another quarter.

From the right of the castle, where the path led to the upper wood, a dozen rifles poured out their fire, and many of the attacking party fell. Then, before the rest could retreat, a body of men and boys came down upon them like an avalanche.

Lucia di Valo, who was looking towards the castle-gate, was swept downwards by her own followers, and, with *Vamos*, carried out of the fray.

All who could retreat by the shattered path promptly did so. But the way was not clear, and some, perforce, had to turn and fight like wolves at bay. Rifles were a useless encumbrance at quarters so close, and both parties cast them down.

The revolver and the knife on one side, and the revolver and short bayonets belonging to the rifles on the other side, came into play.

It was too dark up there for a time; but, shortly after the fray began, a packet was thrown from the ramparts, and dropping on the ground, flared up so as to illumine the scene with a brilliancy approaching that of day.

Shouts of encouragement burst from above, and cries of the same nature were sent through the portcullis, where other spectators were watching the scene.

Well to the fore came Jim Gordon, with Martin,

the blacksmith. Close behind them, Terry, Felton, Dawson, Rainstone, and others, supported by all the trade teachers.

"Bravo, Jim!" yelled a dozen voices from the ramparts. "Well done, Martin!"

The enemy in the rear of the knot, kept behind by the crush, now got away, leaving the course clear, and they began to retreat. From the ramparts a withering fire was poured upon them. Every fifth man rolled over dead or seriously wounded.

Nor did our friends escape scot-free. Martin had an ugly cut from a bullet that grazed his cheek, ripping open the skin. Jim had been stabbed in the arm; and Pastern, the painter, and Waffle, the boot-maker, were down. Two or three of the boys had received minor wounds.

But the enemy by this time were beaten back. The two or three who remained desperately fighting were cut down or shot, and the fight was over.

Pursuit was impossible; it would have been an act of madness. So Jim checked the ardour of some of his hot-headed followers, who would have gone down and sacrificed their lives.

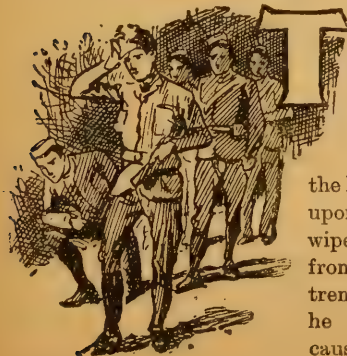
"We have beaten them!" he cried. "They are driven off. There is no more to be done to-night. I wish those fellows on the ramparts would not make such an awful row."

The "awful row" was the enthusiastic cheering of those within the castle; and among other voices was that of Miss Elegantine Dibble, which rose above the roar of the boys' voices like the scream of a steam-whistle in a thunderstorm.

Eveline and her mother, the three niggers—all were there; but Eveline was mute, and her mother, under the influence of excitement, was shedding tears.

CHAPTER CXLV.

THE COST OF THE FIGHT.—REINFORCEMENTS FOR THE FOE.



THE fight was over, and all that now had to be done was to count the cost.

Jim stood by the light that still burnt upon the ground and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. The tremendous exertion he had gone through caused it to run down

in little streams.

Martin and the other men were panting. All, more or less, in that brief spell of fighting, had exerted

themselves to the utmost, and were much in need of that second wind which is so useful to athletes.

There was a sound in the castle of the platform being drawn back, and then the gates opened, letting out a stream of exuberant humanity.

Foremost was Morse, who had been waiting in the castle, with every fibre of his body quivering for Jim's sake.

It was against his will that Jim had taken up the position he had, and it came about in this way.

Fearing activity on the part of the foe—it was a kind of intuitive feeling—a close watch was kept that night, and preparations were made to give the attacking party a warm reception. It was only acting up to Jim's precept, "Better be a week too soon than one minute too late."

Just about the time that Lucia was addressing her men, Martin, who was watching on the ramparts, heard a slight buzzing below. It was only the first sign of movement of the foe; but in the complete stillness of the night the sound floated upwards, was checked by the castle walls, and reached his ears.

Without staying to analyse it, he hastened below to Sleery, who was on duty there, and bade him arouse Jim. In ten minutes Jim was on the ramparts, and became convinced that the foe was moving.

Then, without any fuss, the whole of the inhabitants of the castle were aroused, including the women, in case they should awake of themselves and say or do something to give the foe a clue to their being in readiness.

A word of caution sufficed for all. Arms and ammunition were served out, Miss Elegantine, with a woollen shawl over her head in place of a wrapper, armed herself with the kitchen chopper, and Jim rapidly gave his instructions.

"We must rely mostly on surprises," he said. "When they come up to the front of the castle, let fly at them with the cannon. But as it is possible they may force their way in, after all, we must in that case take them in the rear. About a dozen of us will suffice. The moment they find they are between two fires, a panic will lay hold of them. That, at least, is my opinion."

Morse wanted to go with him; but Jim said his place was in the castle, to defend it till the last moment.

"The instant I hear the gates go down," said Jim, "I shall rush upon them. Give them 'Betsy' when they show up closely enough, and 'Bella' when they force the gates. Now, let me out."

He selected the people he wanted from those who volunteered, and the gates being opened just wide enough, he slipped out with his followers and took up his position on the right side of the castle, where he lay close until the right moment came.

Morse left Sleery in charge of the gate, and commanding silence, stole up to the ramparts with thirty armed youngsters, Changeling, and Trueberry.

There they lay in silent ambush until the foe had scaled the shattered ground. Miss Elegantine and the other two ladies did not go to the ramparts until the firing began. The rest of the incidents of the fight have been already recorded.

And now we have Jim counting the cost.

First of all, Waffle and Pastern, two outside volunteers, were dead. Strange to say, both were shot through the heart, and they died without a pang.

It was sad to think of, but even to the victor in all fights of any magnitude there must be some loss. Reverently they were borne within the castle to await interment on the morrow.

Meanwhile, the wounded were being attended to by Eveline and Mrs. Farrell. The lint which had been prepared now came into service.

Of the foe who had fallen, the majority had been killed outright, but several were wounded, and for the most part mortally. Two only seemed to promise to recover if taken care of. One was a Spaniard and the other a half-caste.

Jim managed to make himself intelligible, and he asked them if he should hoist a flag of truce, so that their friends might come and carry them away in the morning.

"For what use?" asked the Spaniard; "they would not be burdened with us. We might be dragged out of your sight as a blind, and then left to die."

The half-caste expressed something similar, and they were then conveyed into the castle.

"When you are well again," Jim told them, "you can return to your friends."

All the time these matters were being attended to, a watch, of course, was kept against surprise. A foe so cunning might return, but they had had enough for that night, and were seen no more.

The dead of the enemy were left outside until the morning came, when they were to be buried in the little cemetery inside the Redan; for Jim, positively the last in after the fight, felt himself growing faint from loss of blood, and was by the feeling recalled to his wound, which for the time he had forgotten.

He was staggering a little when he passed into the dining-hall, where he found the survivors of the band seated at the table or around the fire.

On seeing him a great shout went up, but as he leant back against the wall it was seen that he was done up, and a dozen friendly arms were put out to support him.

"Don't crowd," cried Terry; "can't you see he is faint?"

"I'm all right," insisted Jim; "let me sit down, anywhere. I should like a cup of coffee."

"The niggers are making it for us all," said Terry. "I say, old fellow, what is this blood running out of your sleeve?"

"A scratch," said Jim.

Here the group of boys were parted, and Mrs. Farrell made her way through.

"Take my arm, Gordon," she said, "and come to the fire."

She led him across the hall, where Eveline was standing. She just looked at Jim, and murmured:

"It is so like you. Why couldn't you come earlier to have your wound dressed?"

"It is nothing," replied Jim. "I was busy, and forgot it."

Mrs. Farrell took a pair of scissors and cut open the sleeve of his jacket.

"It is better than taking it off," she said. "Eveline can stitch it up again. Do you call *this* a scratch? It is a cut nearly to the bone."

"I wish I had the fellow who did it here," said Miss Elegantine, as she strode up.

She had just come from the kitchen, where she had been helping the niggers with the coffee. She still retained the chopper.

"I don't know myself who did it," said Jim, with a faint smile.

"It doesn't matter," said Miss Elegantine. "I would have made one of the villains into mincemeat, on speculation."

Here she flourished her chopper, and nodded her head so violently that the wrapper came off her head.

"You are as savage as a wild Indian," said Mrs. Farrell. "With that chopper you make me think of tomahawks, and what not. Please put it down."

Miss Elegantine did so, and put on her head-gear again.

"I hope you boys were not looking?" she murmured; "it is so awkward. But it will grow again."

"So will peas grow on apple-trees," somebody was heard to say.

"Who said that?" she sharply demanded.

No answer.

"I am sure it was my graceless nephew. Oscar, come here!"

Oscar came forward from quite another part of the hall, pleading dolorously that he hadn't said a word.

"I was dozing off to sleep in the corner, aunt," he said.

"You will come to a bad end," she returned, ignoring his denial. "One of these days you will not only lose your hair, but your head."

"Shall be glad if I do," grunted Dibble, rebelliously. "What's the good of a head like mine?"

"It isn't your head, but your heart, that is wrong, Oscar."

"Well, I'm wrong altogether with you, so the sooner

I'm done for the better. You can make use of that chopper, if you like."

"As if," gasped Miss Elegantine, "I could use it on my own flesh and blood!"

"Not you," growled Dibble, "you take good care of—"

Here he was jerked back by Terry, who told him to go into the corner and let his poor aunt alone—a piece of advice Dibble acted upon, although at the same time he resented it.

The wounded men of the enemy were taken to Chorker's old room, where, the bed being enlarged with two trestles and boards, they were laid down, and Martin, who had his face bandaged, saw to their wounds. One had received a bullet in the calf, and the other a bayonet-thrust inconveniently near the ribs.

"You will get along if you keep quiet," he said, "and you will be well treated, unless you attempt to play tricks. If you do, you will be shot."

"No play tricks—*me*," said the half-caste.

"Diablo!" muttered the Spaniard, "do you take me for a viper or a wolf?"

"All right," returned Martin; "I thought it better to give you a hint."

"It is enough," said the Spaniard; "I am grateful. I swear it."

Martin had his doubts. If there were two classes of human beings he mistrusted, they were the low-class Spaniard and the "half nigger." He had seen something of both in his time, and how far he was in this instance justified in his doubts we shall see by-and-by.

The wounded seen to, and all the combatants refreshed with coffee, all those not on duty retired to get what sleep they could after the tremendous excitement of the night.

But they were getting hardened to it, as warriors during a campaign, and if some were a bit restless, they all managed to get a little repose before the dawn.

Early in the morning the dead outside were buried, Jim attending with his left arm in a sling. Pastern and Waffle they buried in the Roman Camp. There was no sign of the enemy below, not a single one of them showed from under the shadow of the cliff. The notion of their having cleared out began to get hold before noon.

But whithersoever they had gone it could not be very far, for their boats were still in the lagoon.

The hope expressed was an idea of a speculative description, and a vain one. For behold, in the afternoon two other boats were espied approaching the island. They were making for the lagoon, but suddenly altered their course, no doubt in response to some signal ashore, and headed for Silver Bay. Jim with his glass made out at least twenty men in them.

"Reinforcements for Lucia di Valo," said Jim. "She will go on as long as she can import a man to help her."

"Rough," muttered Martin, who was standing by his side. "In the end they will exhaust our means of defence, and wear us out."

"We shall see," replied Jim. "The time for giving in has not yet arrived."

CHAPTER CXLVI.

CHORKER GETS HOLD OF SOME IMPORTANT INFORMATION.



IT was a joyless life Chorker spent the first two days in the cave. Compelled to skulk alone, yet within hail of company, it was very trying.

It is true that the society of the three schoolmasters would have been anything but congenial to him; still, friend or foe, they would have been somebody to talk to. Better be quarrelling with people than have to endure everlasting silence.

He had food for the present, but thirst worried him, for he had brought nothing to slake it with him.

On the second night he had to wait until he was satisfied the three men were asleep, and then steal down into the chine, where there were many little springs, at one of which he assuaged his thirst.

"Nuff to freeze a feller," he muttered, when he had drunk his fill. "Blessed if I can see any good in water being so cold."

That was the nearest thing he could arrive at as an expression of gratitude.

He stole back again, under the impression that he was not observed. But the timorous, worn-out Turner was awake and saw him go by, although he recognised him not.

He made no sign, uttered no sound, because he could not. He was scared half out of his wits.

When on the following morning he told his companions that he had seen a ghost, they shook in their shoes, but called him a fool.

It was the morning after the fight, of which they had heard nothing. Chorker was out and back again before that notable engagement began.

Notwithstanding their abusive style of reply to Turner, both Mr. Farrell and Storeby feared it was true. So when Morse came down that afternoon they asked him if he had seen anything on the way.

"What should I see?" he asked.

They were speaking in a low tone. Mr. Farrell dropped his voice to the lowest whisper.

"Turner," he said, "saw a ghost last night."

"What sort of one?" asked Morse, not in the least disturbed.

"It was like a man," quavered Turner, "only with enormous feet and eyes. It glided in from the chine and vanished up the cave."

"You dreamt it," said Morse.

"Indeed I didn't. I was wide awake, as wide as I am at this moment."

"Well, if I meet with that ghost," was all Morse said, with a smile, "I shall give it notice to quit."

"It is very unpleasant to stay here," said Mr. Farrell.

"If you try outside," replied Morse, "you will find it more unpleasant still. Another swarm of ruffians has landed on the island."

"Save us!" groaned all three in concert.

Morse was not at all nervous. He had no belief in ghosts appearing to Turner, unless for some more special reason than frightening him.

He left them, smiling, and went straight back, carrying his lantern to guide him.

Chorker was on the lookout and followed up, right away this time, so that he saw the trap-door opened and caught a glimpse of the laboratory. He very nearly gave a shout of exultation, but he restrained himself, and groped his way back. Somehow, he had no fancy for remaining so far from all society in the cave. By-and-by, when he judged that the night had arrived, he would return and have a look about the castle.

Returning to his old quarters, he overheard the three men talking, in louder tones than they had used when Morse was there, about the ghost. This was the first inkling of their fears in that direction Chorker had obtained, and it amused him mightily.

"I'll ghost more than one of you afore I've done," he muttered.

He lay close until the day waned and the long night came down. Then he had to estimate the flight of time, and as it passed slowly he decided to get on part of the way and indulge in a pipe. He had tobacco and all else required. Half-way between the laboratory he stopped and lit up his pipe.

Only those who love tobacco can conceive the relish it was to him. He drew at it as the thirsty traveller would imbibe nectar. He smoked it down to his last whiff, and then filled again.

"I'll have my full smoke," he muttered, "if I never do agen."

He smoked until he had not a scrap of the popular weed left. Then he thought it must be getting late, and began to feel his way back again.

When he had performed part of the journey, he reflected that it was probably too soon, and retraced his steps. In this way he shilly-shallied until he was sure of having waited long enough, and then he made for the trap-door.

He crept up the flight of steps, and saw, to his dismay, that a light was burning in the laboratory. He could see it through the cracks made by the shrinkage of the wood.

But there was no sound, not so much as a shuffling footstep. Nobody was there. They must have coughed or hummed a tune, or made some movement.

Gently he raised the trap an inch or two, and peered into the room. Nobody there. But a lamp was burning somewhere handy; it was on the table over his head. Most likely it had been left there and forgotten.

"I'll risk it," he muttered; "there ain't no noise in the blooming hall. Them boys have gone to bed."

He pushed the trap right over, and crept from under the table. Stealthily he advanced to the door, and listened. Not a sound.

All gone to bed.

Then he tried to open the door.

Locked!

"What a blamed fool I was not to remember that that 'ere Morse allus locked it!" he muttered.

It was a severe, a bitter, an overwhelming disappointment.

All his manœuvring had been in vain. A feeling of animosity was roused in his breast, as if some great wrong had been done him.

"I'll be even with 'em for this," he growled. "It wouldn't take much for me to sell 'em to the enemy. Them's the parties as would make light of that door at night. They could bust it open. I durstn't."

He chuckled as he thought of selling the castle, especially when by so doing he saw a chance of saving his own hide.

Yes, he would do it, and so get even with everybody he had wronged. He mentally put down as wrongs everything that had been done to him. It was a thought worthy of the man, and a thought that soothed his venomous breast.

Stealthily he crept back again, and, with the new thought in his mind, descended the steps. On he went, groping in the dark and thinking—thinking, until he suddenly stopped.

Instead of feeling his way back with his *right* hand, he had been unconsciously doing it with his *left*.

And he had been walking half an hour or more.

"Now suppose I've come the wrong way and lost myself!" he groaned. "Lost myself!—no—'tain't possible. I can go back as I came. Steady, now—on the left, in course."

He was wrong again, but he did not think of it

until he had travelled some distance, when it suddenly flashed upon him.

"I think," he muttered, "that I've gone right off my head to-night."

He was in a state of tremor, and groaned aloud.

"Ain't there nobody to help me?" he asked, in a miserable way. "I wouldn't care if it was——"

He pulled up short and checked the word that rose to his lips. His eyes bulged out of his head, for there directly before him was a faint spark of fire. It was like an eye fixed on him in the dark, and it made him shiver. He was hot and cold half a dozen times in as many seconds. He tried to speak, but his tongue clove to his mouth. Faint and overcome, he leant against the wall.

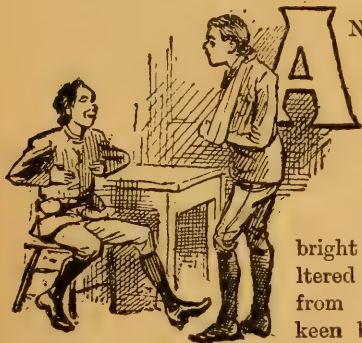
A moment later there was another spark, a little lower down than the rest. He stared at them in increased wonderment and terror.

Suddenly both sparks blazed up, and one took the form of a face of the most ghastly hue. The other represented a bony hand. No other portions of a body were visible.

The hand beckoned to him to follow, the face grinned malevolently, and, with a loud cry, he threw up his arms and fainted away.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

MORSE IS MYSTERIOUS.—COMING DANGER.



ANOTHER quiet morning, the second after the failure of the assault upon the castle. The boys lounging about in the bright sunshine, sheltered in the courtyard from the somewhat keen breeze that was

blowing.

Jim, having gone his rounds, now had a look about back and front of the castle, then he came into the dining-hall, and found Morse there alone, laughing quietly, but in a way that showed he was much amused at something.

Morse stopped on seeing Jim, and asked him how his arm was getting on.

"You asked me that an hour ago," answered Jim, "and I told you it was doing famously. Healing up by clockwork. I shall drop the sling to-night."

"That's all right," said Morse. "Nothing stirring?"

"Nothing. Shall we go out to the yard?"

"May as well. Nothing like the open air."

"By the way, Morse, what were you grinning at just now?"

"I never grin, that I know of."

"Fudge!" (they were in the courtyard now, and Morse was smiling again), "you have some joke on."

"I have," answered Morse.

And then he went off again.

Jim stared, and some of the other boys—Terry, Peskett, and Trimmer—also regarded Morse in wonderment.

It was rarely that Morse exhibited jovial propensities, and here he was doubled up with laughter.

"Excuse me, dear boys," he said, wiping his eyes, "but I *can't* help it."

"Look here, old fellow," said Jim, very seriously, "this is quite out of your line, and it won't do."

"Why shouldn't I laugh if I've a mind to?" demanded Morse.

"You don't as a rule curl yourself up with it," suggested Trimmer.

"Well," said Morse, "I've a reason for doing it now, and I shall curl myself up if I like, and be blown to you."

He went off singing, and vanished under the gateway. His friends he left behind look at each other with unwonted gravity.

"He sticks too close to those blessed figures," said Jim.

"It seems to me," said Terry, "that he has gone wrong another way. The success of his experiments has upset him."

"The next thing he will be doing, will be blowing himself up."

"When he does that," said Jim, mournfully, "we shall go with him."

There was little doubt about that. They all knew well enough that it would be so, and more than once troublesome thoughts had come to them in turn.

Everybody knows that the cleverest fellows sometimes make a mistake, and if Morse did so, it would be a mistake that could never be rectified.

Jim thought it better to go after him, in a quiet, casual sort of way, but first he slipped back to see if the key was in the door of the laboratory. Morse generally left it there during the daytime, knowing that no living being in the place would have the temerity to enter there, unless accompanied by him.

But the key was not there. Jim tried the door. It was fast.

More and more troubled, he hastened after Morse, found he was not in the passage by the main gates, and stole up to the ramparts.

Waller was there on sentry duty. Morse was leaning on the rampart wall, still laughing. On seeing Jim he deliberately cut a caper. It was the first Jim

had ever seen him indulge in, and he was more and more troubled. But he tried to smile, as if he considered it a very pleasing thing. Result—a dismal failure.

Morse laughed louder than ever.

"Oh, Jim," he said, "you *do* amuse me!"

"I wish I could return the compliment," was the involuntary reply.

"When you get a goose in a trap," began Morse, speaking slowly, "in a—ha, ha! it is *too* good—what do you do with him?"

"Kill him and eat him, I should say," returned Jim.

"But suppose that goose is not worth the trouble of killing, and too tough to eat, what then?"

"Let the beggar go."

"No, not if I know it. I shall keep my goose. It is so pleasant to hear him cackle. You shall hear him before long."

"Did you get any sleep last night?" asked Jim, anxiously.

"Not much, but that is nothing new. You and I have had many sleepless nights."

"What were you doing—experimenting?"

"Yes; on the ways of geese—or, rather, a goose." Then off he went again.

Jim was now at the end of his wits, and the more serious he looked the more Morse laughed. Finally, with tears in his eyes, he passed Jim and descended the stairs. Jim followed, resolved to stop him, by force if need be, if he attempted to handle any of the dangerous compounds in his laboratory. He had not the slightest doubt now that something had gone wrong with the ingenious brain of his friend.

Morse, however, went no further than the courtyard, where, in apparent ignorance of the general interest now bestowed upon his movements, he wandered about with his hands in his pockets, softly whistling.

"What is the matter with him?" asked Hillyard.

"Leave him to me," whispered Jim. "I'll watch over him. Take no notice."

It really seemed the best thing to do, but the boys were as nervous as so many people boxed inside a menagerie, with a mad elephant wandering around and threatening every moment to break out.

"I reckon," said Morse, "that about ten pounds of my melenite would separate every stone in this ancient castle, although it was put together with the best mortar and cement."

He addressed Felton, who hurriedly said he believed it would. Crossing over to Jim, he said that Morse ought to be lured into some room and locked up.

"He may have the melenite about him," said Jim, sententiously.

"Then take it way from him."

"Certainly, when a shaking may explode it."

"It is a blessed game!" said Felton, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"Jim!" sang out Morse.

"Yes, old fellow?"

Jim's voice was shaking with pity. Morse seemed to be struggling against a tendency to laugh.

"Come and see my goose."

"I will," said Jim. "Now, boys," he softly said to the rest, "you rely upon me. In the humour he is in, I had better go alone."

"You have but one arm," suggested Terry.

"Never mind. That will be all that is required."

"Come along!" sang out Morse.

"I should like to see that goose, too," said Terry.

"Then you won't, just yet," was the reply. "Stop where you are."

Morse spoke in his most decided manner, which left no room for discussion. Whatever betided, Jim would have to go alone.

In the case of any ordinary person, matters would have been different, but doing anything with Morse in his present condition was, in their opinion, like handling a barrel of gunpowder in a house on fire.

So they went together, the two old friends, and Jim was not surprised when Morse went direct to the laboratory and unlocked the door.

"My right hand is all right," he thought, "and if I see he is going to do anything wild, I must knock him down."

It was a last resource, and not pleasant to contemplate, but the lives of so many were at stake. Morse, however, did nothing in the laboratory to excite attention, but went over to the table on which a bull's-eye lantern was standing, picked it up, and pushing the table aside, opened the trapdoor.

"My goose is down here," he said, gravely, "fairly trapped. I have a light burning below."

Jim began to breathe more freely. Together they descended the steps. Morse, now silent, with a motion of his hand expressed a desire that Jim also should refrain from speaking.

Walking swiftly and quietly, he traversed half the distance towards the mouth of the cave until they came to one of the side turnings on the left, which up to that hour they had never attempted to explore.

He was on the point of turning down it, when he pulled up sharp, and turned a listening ear towards the direct passage familiar to them both. A murmur of voices floated up from that direction.

"Something wrong down there," said Morse; "the goose must wait. This way, Jim."

His manner of speaking was as natural as ever, and turning off the light of the bull's-eye lantern, he hastened on with Jim behind him. The mouth of the cave soon hove in sight, and the contention of voices

grew clearer to the ear. But they came from the chine without.

"The fools," muttered Morse, "have gone out in the daylight and got caught."

It was too true.

Stealing up near enough to the open air, so as to see without being seen, the two friends looked down and beheld Mr. Farrell and his two assistants in the custody of half a score of the enemy, busily engaged in binding their arms.

At the feet of the captured, crestfallen men lay some tubers and other vegetables, showing that a rash visit to the farm had led to their falling into the hands of the enemy.

The game they were attempting to play was that of complete ignorance of the nature of the warfare going on, and all people concerned therein.

"My friends," Mr. Farrell was loudly declaring, "there is no need for any of this violent treatment. We are three men recently wrecked upon this island, harmless men in every way."

"Why bind us," urged Storeby, "when we are willing to go quietly?"

"It doesn't matter," moaned Turner. "I felt this morning that something was going to happen."

"This is rather serious," said Morse. "Why could not the fools lie close?"

"Because they *are* fools!" bitterly replied Jim; "there they go! Those fellows did not seem to understand what they said."

"Probably they do not. Now that they are gone, we will first have a peep at my goose, and then consider what ought to be done in the face of the capture of Farrell and the others."

"Talks as sensible as ever, bar the goose," muttered Jim.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

THE GOOSE IN CAPTIVITY.—THAT UNHAPPY BIRD HEARS NOISES AND SEES VISIONS.



NOW, there had been one thing about the disappearance of Chorker that made it a thing apart from the vanishing of the schoolmaster. Nobody, to all appearance, paid the least attention to it.

Jim, in fact, did not miss him, which may be accounted for by the fact of Chorker employing his time in the kitchen. Nor was he thought of by the others, owing to the recent whirl of exciting events.

Romeo, of course, knew where he was, and on being questioned by Macbeth and Hamlet, he said, "He s'posed that Marse Jim had got him on some job," which satisfied them. They took little account of Chorker, and were just as well pleased to be without his assistance as with it.

Now Chorker was the goose Morse had on his mind when he exhibited so much unwonted jocularity.

With the aid of some phosphorescent spirit he had made himself, as far as his face and one hand went, a sufficiently terrible spectre to cause Chorker to faint away, and while he was in an insensible condition he trussed that worthy and left him alone.

A few hours afterwards he returned, and heard him cackling in a curious kind of way over the wrongs and mysteries of his life. Finding himself bound hand and foot, he suspected the purely natural origin of the grim spectre he had seen, and wrath took the place of fear.

"But how the juice did he, whosoever it is, find me out?" was the chief comment in his mind, as he dwelt upon the affair.

He could not tell that it was entirely owing to Turner having talked of seeing a ghost. Morse, suspecting that it was some living person, kept his eyes open as he wandered back, seeing nothing, but hearing something in the form of a suppressed snort, which Chorker was wont to indulge in.

He was at all times much given to snorting, and it cost him a mighty effort to subdue the habit in the cave.

Morse made no pretence of hearing anything, but having returned to the castle, and satisfied himself that Chorker was missing, decided it was he, and laid a trap for him.

On the night Chorker came to the laboratory Morse was already below, and lay close against the wall as the other crept by. Anticipating Chorker's coming thither, he had taken care not leave anything dangerous about in his workshop above.

His original intention was to scare him as he waited near the entrance to the cave, but Chorker's losing his way upset this arrangement. Morse, however, followed him, guided by the sound of his footsteps, and the result we know.

"Jim," whispered Morse, suddenly laying a hand upon his arm, "listen to the bird cackling."

Jim listened, and as Chorker was still some distance off, his spluttering comments upon his position, being unintelligible, sounded uncommonly like cackling.

"Strange!" said the wondering Jim.

"Excuse my having a little joke all to myself for a time," said Morse. "It's Chorker!"

And then he told Jim all about it, which led that worthy youth to confound himself for being a bit of a donkey.

"We really thought that the study of chemicals had turned your brain," he said.

"I could see it," chuckled Morse, "and played up to the character. Oh, dear! that was why I laughed more than I should have done."

"It was a sell, anyway," returned Jim, joyfully. "I am as pleased as Punch to find you are all right."

"Now let me decorate you," whispered Morse. Chorker will be taken aback when he sees there are two of us."

They looked ghastly enough to scare a much better man than Chorker when the work was done. Two such faces would have made a fortune in a pantomime.

"It is most unearthly," said Jim.

Walking quietly, they went on in the dark, Morse acting as guide and holding Jim by the arm. The voice of Chorker grew clearer. He was screwing up his courage by expressing a disbelief in ghosts.

"Blamed if I take heed on 'em," he was saying; "them boys have copped me and come some of their tricks. A ghost, indeed! Bosh!"

"Ow-w-w!" groaned Morse.

"All right," said Chorker, shutting his eyes; "go on ahead."

He was sitting with his legs tucked under him and his elbows trussed to his knees. Morse stealthily threw some of the spirit he had in a bottle upon the wall over his head, so that he could be plainly seen.

"I ain't afeard of yer," said Chorker, with his eyes still closed. "Why don't you leave off tortering me, and bring a poor old man a bit of wittles?"

No answer being given, he soon slowly opened his eyes, but only to close them with a gasp.

"Two on 'em!" he cried; "I'm done for!"

"You asked for food," said Morse. "It is here."

He had brought a couple of ship's biscuits with him, which he placed at his feet and poured some of the illuminating liquid round them.

"Eat while you can. To-morrow the supply may be short."

Morse motioned to Jim that he was about to retreat, and they slowly backed in company until Chorker was left alone with his illuminated biscuits and his misery. To keep his eyes closed for any length of time was an impossibility. Slowly he opened them again, and not seeing the dreaded faces, breathed more freely.

"He said something about wittles," he murmured, his grosser appetites coming to the fore; "he—here, what's this? Biscuits soaked in brimstone! Oh, dear!"

Dismayed, he stared at the biscuits which most people would have considered peculiar and shuddered as he thought of eating them.

"I durstn't do it," he groaned, "not being brought

up on that 'ere kind o' wittles. I ain't made of copper or iron, but flesh and blood."

The spirit soon evaporated, and he was left again in darkness. It never occurred to him that after all the biscuits were eatable, and could be got at if he shifted his ground a bit. The bare idea of partaking of food provided under such uncanny circumstances made him shiver.

The idea of the boys being responsible for it all for a time lost its hold upon him. For a while he sat dumb with terror, but not being intellectually sensitive, he soon came out of the semi-trance with such wits as he had tolerably clear.

Again hope came to him. He was at all events spared. Whatever the power that had made him a helpless prisoner might be, it had not been exerted to the extent of taking his life. He lived, and that was something.

But he was uncommonly hungry. His was such a nature that, though bowed down with cowardice, he would have eaten a hearty breakfast on the morning of his execution.

He was thirsty, too, and had a singing in his ears.

Finally a kind of stupor came over him, and he fell asleep.

From repose—if such troubled dreams as he had could bear that name—he was aroused by a sharp, cracking sound. It was as if some person had thrown a stone against a big window-pane.

He was awake in a moment, and with wonderful readiness remembered where he was.

The sound was repeated, not only once, but twice, and thrice.

"Some new game on," he muttered; "ghosts don't let off fireworks. It's the boys."

Again, and for the last time, the sound was repeated. Then there came stealing up to him a sulphureous smell, not sufficiently pungent to be stifling, but still far from pleasant. It did not increase, and he bore up against it until it subsided and passed away.

Then there was the sound of hurrying feet, and words being uttered by a speaker as he passed a short distance from Chorker.

He could not catch the sense, nor distinguish the voice so as to recognise it.

"Such a place for games," he muttered, "as this blessed island there never was. Nothing but games. What's the latest, I wonder?"

He shifted his position a little with the aid of his hands, that just touched the ground. The finger-tips came in contact with the biscuit, and as he strove to grasp it his bonds suddenly loosened.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he exclaimed.

There was no doubt about it. His bonds were loosened. He could shake off the cords almost without an effort.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By **E. HARCOURT BURRAGE**, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



The remaining portion of the barricade fell with a crash, and the horde of ruffians were pouring

Who had done this while he slept, or had he never been really bound? He remembered that on finding himself corded up he had made no strenuous effort to get free.

"I'll bet a penny," he growled, "that the whole thing is a sell."

He got upon his feet with the biscuit in his hand. Putting it to his nose, he smelt it, gingerly. There was not the slightest suspicion of sulphur about it. Then he bit off a piece of it. The flavour was, as usual, only improved by his hunger. Satisfied he had nothing to fear, he ate it all, and then waited internal sulphuric symptoms.

Nothing of the sort transpired. It was a good, wholesome biscuit, and he felt all the better for it.

"It was a game right through," he muttered, "and I'll be even with 'em for it—when I get out of this 'ere hole."

Yes—when he got out of it! But which way was he to go? While partaking of the biscuit he had, as some people do when eating standing, moved this way and that, turning half-round at times and back again. The movement was merely mechanical, but it had thrown him out as to his position.

Could he have known where to resume his seat, he would have known the way to take. The voices he had recently heard would have been his guide. But now, without light, he must trust to chance, and, as it would never do to remain there doing nothing, he made his choice of road, and started.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

LUCIA AND THE PRISONERS.—THE TRAITOR RENEWS HIS TREACHERY.



LUCIA DI VALO had shifted her camp, her object being to get a time of rest, so as to enable her followers to recover from their defeat.

It had given them a shaking, and could they have retreated without discovery and subsequent shame, the majority of them would have vanished.

But they were held to their posts by two things—the influence of the woman leader, and the fear of social ostracism at Minorca. When they left there with the fiery Lucia, quite a public affair had been made of it. They were going with her to destroy a nest of hornets made by a modern representative of the Napoleon family, who was plotting to seize on

Spain as a starting-point from which again to run over Europe.

One Giuseppe, a well-known smuggler, had laughed at the expedition, which, he declared, was going against a lot of boys—who would thrash them; but he was hooted and pelted by the populace as a drunken fool.

The puissant governor, Don Carlos Spartola, publicly reproved him for his conduct, and talked of having him cited to the Government as a traitor to his country.

Happily he did not proceed so far, and Giuseppe one morning disappeared in his boat, and was seen no more for a long time.

It was supposed that he had gone to Gibraltar, where some devoutly hoped he would be captured while smuggling, and sent to prison. It would serve him right for deriding the valiant band sent out against the plotters of Fermentera Island. So they dismissed Giuseppe, but we may hear more of him anon.

It was late in the afternoon when Lucia, hearing a commotion in the camp, came out of her tent, where she had been brooding. She had her melancholy moods at times, but took great care that her men should see naught of them. The effect would have been most demoralising.

The cause of the hubbub was the arrival of the three prisoners, whom she recognised as having seen about with the boys, and Mr. Farrell she knew by name and sight.

"How now?" she inquired. "Where did you find these noble specimens of their breed?"

"Yonder," said one of the men, pointing up the chine.

The answer surprised her, for she naturally believed them to have come direct from the castle. Turning to Mr. Farrell, she looked him through and through.

"How is your daughter?" she abruptly asked.

"I have not seen her for days," he replied.

"How so? Explain."

The schoolmaster, speaking with parched lips, bethought himself of a lie, and gave it out by way of reply:

"I am turned adrift because I will have nothing to do with the wild, lawless acts of the mad boys I have taken as pupils."

Lucia laughed, dryly, sarcastically.

"Where did you get such a precious collection of cubs?" was her next query.

Another lie was ready. Cowardice made him fertile in them.

"They were placed under my charge by the British Government for reformation," he said.

Lucia looked nonplussed for a moment, and then a light broke in upon her.

"They have been criminals?" she said.

"They have," answered the ready impostor.

"No, no," interposed Turner. With all his nervousness and misery, he could not stand by and hear the boys he admired in his heart thus grossly libelled.

"Ah!" exclaimed Lucia, "you say that he lies?"

"I do," answered Turner, firmly. "The only fault there is in the boys, in his eyes, is that they are not arrant cowards."

"What say you?" demanded Lucia, turning to Storeby.

"I have had no share in the doings of the boys," was his answer, "and I do not countenance them. Where they came from and who they are I was never told."

"Mean, mean!" cried Turner, "more than mean—despicable!"

"Fool!" hissed Mr. Farrell.

"Tell me your story truly," said Lucia. "Have you not come here to spy upon us?"

This they all denied with truth, and Turner told her why they had left the castle. They wished to be out of danger when it fell into her hands.

"And you think it will fall?" she asked, with glistening eyes.

Again they were of one opinion. They were sure of it, and she quoted their uttered words to such of her followers as did not understand their language.

She wanted to know why they should think so, and Mr. Farrell said it was impossible to hold out long. The question of provisions must soon become a serious one. Then there was that of ammunition, of which he *believed* they were running short.

"But we must be provisioned, too," she said. "We cannot dally here for ever. How did you leave the castle?"

"We were blindfolded and led out of it," said the schoolmaster. "When our bandages were removed we found ourselves in the cave."

"What cave?"

He pointed up the chine, and the men said there was a cave near the spot where they found the prisoners.

Mr. Farrell here stepped forward, and in a low tone intimated that he wished to speak to Lucia *di Valo* alone.

"It is possible," he said, "that I may show you how to take the castle by surprise."

She reflected a moment, and then ordered him to be led to her tent and left there. The other two she placed under the care of some of her men, with the command to see that they did not escape, on peril of their lives.

"I only ask you, *senorita*," said Turner as he was going away, "to listen to what that man says with reservations. Leave a gap for the truth to be inserted in later on."

Mr. Farrell glared at him venomously, ~~but~~ said

nothing. Vamos took him by the arm and led him into Lucia's tent. Shortly after she followed.

"You may remain," she said to her lover. "Now, Sir Schoolkeeper, what is it you propose?"

Mr. Farrell entered into the details of his leaving the castle, assuring her that they had come by way of the cave, and that therefore by the cave a way could be found into the castle.

"And it must be found in the night-time," he said, "when all but two or three are asleep."

"I choose my own time," said Lucia; "but your advice seems reasonable. It's a long way from the chine to the castle."

"Morse comes and goes daily," he rejoined.

"Who is Morse?"

"A young chemist in the school—the manufacturer of the explosives."

"Ah!" breathed Vamos, venomously, "I should like to get hold of *him*."

"What is your price for betraying your friends?" asked Lucia.

"I have no friends," replied the schoolmaster; "they all act like my bitter enemies."

"The price for betraying them, whoever they be?"

"My life."

"Cheap," said Lucia, contemptuously; "it is of no value to anybody but yourself."

He winced under the biting sarcasm, and Vamos laughed, softly.

"You have a wife there," said Lucia.

"I care not. She has forfeited the right to my protection," was the answer.

"You swore to protect and cherish her. You loved her once?"

"Perhaps; but all that is past."

"Then there is your daughter?"

"She goes with the mother and turns against me. Why should I consider her?"

"You may serve my turn," said Lucia, "or I would spit upon you, base as I am. But your life shall be spared if we get possession of the castle. You may live, if only to realise how unutterably contemptible you are."

She beckoned to Vamos, and the two conferred in whispers for a while. When the conference ended Lucia again addressed the schoolmaster.

"To-night," she said, "we will endeavour, under your guidance, to get possession of the castle. Should we fail, *from any cause whatever*, you will be shot to-morrow. I cannot have my camp encumbered with useless lumber."

"Possibly," said Mr. Farrell, deprecatingly, and with his face wet with fear, "the cave may be intricate. I have never penetrated it."

"If there is a way to the castle," returned Lucia, "it will be found. Vamos, take him away."

CHAPTER CL.

THE CARE OF THE WOUNDED.—ROMEO'S ADVICE.



HERE were no indications in the castle that evening of the possibility of treachery. The ordinary sentries went to their posts in turn, and the rest of the occupants assembled in the big hall, where a fire was burning merrily on the huge hearth.

Jim sat with Eveline and the two elder ladies near it, and not a word did he say of the capture of the three masters in the chine. Nor was it mentioned by him or Morse elsewhere.

After tea Mrs. Farrell looked to the wounded, and declared that all were going on favourably. She made two exceptions, however, in the half-caste and the Spaniard, on whom Romeo attended.

In this duty the youngest of the negroes was assisted by Charley, the bear, who went in and out and lay about the bedside, as if appointed to the post of seeing that they did not run away. At first his presence alarmed the wounded strangers, but on Romeo assuring them that he was harmless as a lamb they took more kindly to him. The name of the half-caste, it seemed, was Harac, that of the Spaniard Moravello.

Both understood sufficient English to understand Romeo. The half-caste had served on board a British merchantman, and the Spaniard knew something of the English language through his having often gone to Gibraltar and spent a month at a time on that historical Rock.

"Bet now you've done a bit of something, sometime," said Romeo, as he handed them their evening gruel.

Moravello smiled, as if it were a needless question.

"All who go to the Rock smuggle," he said, adding, a moment later, "There is nothing else to do. It is an accursed place."

"You no like de English dere?"

"Who likes his conqueror?"

"Well," said Romeo, "if you am down and can't get up, it bess to make de mose of *bein'* down. See dat?"

"What will they do if we get well?" asked Moravello. "Shoot us?"

"Bless me, no!" exclaimed Romeo. "You jess listen to me. Behave yourself, bof ob you, *like* genelman, and as genelman you be treated, sure."

"Suppose we are found by our people, armed, fighting against them, do you know our fate?"

"No fear ob dat," said Romeo. "You reckon dat if all de world come agin dese boys dat dey hab to go *under*."

The utmost faith in the youngsters was expressed in the manner of Romeo, as well as the words. The swarthy half-caste was deeply impressed.

"Me go with 'em," he said; "kind and brave."

"Bout de bess ting you do," said Romeo; "but de mose expect ob you will be dat you make yourself useful and *lie low*. Dat de secret of gettin' on in dis world. Lie low. Look at me. I allus lie low, and see whar me am. At de top ob de tree in dis place, and my word suspected by eberybody. Look at my fader and de ole man Macbef. Bof ob dem stuck up frum dere birf. Where dey? Jess nowhar."

It happened, unfortunately, that Macbeth, while this powerful statement was being made, entered the room unobserved. He listened with all the indignation of a monarch hearing himself derided by his subjects.

"Spec you gone off you head, Romeo," he said, "done talkin' foolish dere."

"What am foolish?" demanded Romeo.

"You lubricatin' your fader and myself wif libellous bobversations. Who stick hisself up, eh?"

"Who doin' it now?" asked Romeo. "Marse Gordon say dat you 'bout de mose contramushus ole nigger that eber lib long 'nuff to hab him head floured wif ole age. You git out here, disturbin' de sick pussons."

"Spec' me will in due time," said Macbeth. "Missus Farrell want you. Been looking for you carkiss eberywhar."

This was a command not to be disobeyed. So Romeo got up and left the patients with a parting word.

"Take no notis ob *him*," referring to his indignant grandfather; "he born wif a big bumble-bee in him bonnet."

Macbeth looked at him, showing a lot of the white of his eyes, but he took no further notice, and followed him out of the room, leaving the sick men to reflect on what they had heard.

It was the half-caste, who first gave utterance to his thoughts. He spoke in Spanish.

"The nigger good," he said; "but the boys better. I stake all on them."

"So do I," muttered Moravello. "All the saints are on their side. I can see it, lying here—*they will win*."

CHAPTER CLI.

FARRELL'S FAILURE AND FLIGHT.—LUCIA DI VALO'S
VENGEANCE.

WHATEVER Mrs. Farrell required Romeo for, it did not detain him long. In half an hour he was back in the kitchen, where his elders were sitting by the fire. "It a bery cold night," he said. "Spect dere be a bit ob frost." "You get a frost 'bout you if you go a-lie-lousing you fader again," said that august personage. "Lie low, you infant prodigal."

Romeo smiled with the lofty air of a superior spirit, and sat down by the fire, filled his pipe, and smoked in silence. From the distant hall came the softened sound of laughter. There was no thought of danger in the minds of the boys that night.

At a comparatively early hour all retired, with but two watchers, one by the outer gate, and the other on the ramparts. The latter was Martin, the blacksmith, and he varied his marching to and fro by occasionally ascending to the top of the tower.

From thence, afar off, he presently caught a glimpse of lights burning in the direction of the chine. It was only the faintest glow, but he knew it portended a movement of some sort. But he had received his instructions not to raise a needless alarm, and while the glow came no nearer he made no sign.

The camp of Lucia di Valo was astir, for all save two, to remain as guard over Storeby and Turner, were bound on an expedition to the cave. Thither was the schoolmaster to lead them, and all believed that the hour of triumph was at hand.

Had the schoolmaster no thought for those he was about to betray?

None. Wrapped in the garment of utter selfishness, over which was the cloak of cowardice, he had no thought for living being outside himself. He believed his own life was in peril, and to save that at any cost was the only thought in his mind.

And his life was at stake.

Failure from any cause! Lucia di Valo had declared it was to followed with a measure of rugged justice. He would be shot.

Indifferent to or unconscious of the possibility of being observed from the castle, Lucia di Valo commanded her men to have ready a supply of pine torches to light the way in the cave. They also

needed light to guide them up the chine, which was dark at night time.

The men were ready, and fell into line. Lucia came out of her tent, and, with Vamos and Mr. Farrell, led the way.

The schoolmaster was free as to his arms and legs, but Vamos walked by his side, pistol in hand, ready to shoot him if he attempted to fly. But the traitor had no such thought. He was *certain* that the end of the night's expedition would be the capture of the castle, and with it an end to his personal peril.

On they went silently over the rugged path of the chine. They had not far to go, and Mr. Farrell, knowing the ground, called a halt.

"Here," he said, "we turn and ascend the slope. The cave is near its summit."

They toiled up and up, with the torches throwing a flickering, uncertain light, until the very summit was reached. *But there was no cave.*

Bewildered, Mr. Farrell paused and looked about him.

"This *must* be the spot," he murmured, "but——"

"Seek it to the right or left," interposed Vamos, impatiently.

Mr. Farrell did so. Now to the right and then to the left, up and down, but no cave. He stopped again, utterly dumbfounded.

"Is the place bewitched?" he asked. "The cave was here, or there, I swear it."

"Find it," was all Lucia said, her voice hard and cold.

In vain did they search, moving along the summit of the slope. No cave was to be found. Suddenly one of the men uttered an exclamation. Lucia asked him what was the matter.

"Senorita," he said, "there has been a landslip here."

It was so. As the torch-bearers drew up and formed a circle, the ground, newly broken, was revealed. But it was no ordinary landslip. The ground seemed to have been heaved up ere it fell. Besides, what could have caused it?

There had been no recent heavy rains, none of the usual winter storms, nothing to cause the slightest terrestrial disturbance. Therefore the shifting of the ground must have been the work of some living being.

Mr. Farrell grasped the portent of it all. His purpose by some mysterious means had been anticipated and thwarted. By whom he could shrewdly guess.

"This spot is immediately above the mouth of the cave?" said Lucia, sternly.

"I—I—I think so," he stammered.

"Do you not *know* it?"

"I do."

"Enough," said Lucia. "You shammed being a traitor to save your worthless life. You thought that

I would accept this as an accident. It was done by you, or some of your boys with their explosives."

"I fear so."

"You fear so! You know it. You were in the plot to deceive me. There is something more in this than meets the eye. Take him back, and at sunrise shoot him!"

Mr. Farrell uttered a loud cry of despair. Then terror gave him daring, and lent him wings. He sprang away from the side of Vamos, and dashed towards the wood.

"Kill him!" shrieked Lucia.

Half a score of rifles were fired, and there was an answering scream from the flying man. But his flight was not stayed, and he vanished in the gloom.

"One has got away," said Lucia, angrily, "but the other two shall suffer. Let us go back. They shall be shot at once."

Her bitter disappointment for the moment seemed to age her, and by the light of the flickering torches her face was old and witch-like. Vamos gazed at it in terror. But it changed again almost on the instant, and the beautiful face was there again, calm and resolute.

Back to the camp they went, and Lucia walked to the tent where the other two captives had been left. By the entrance to it lay one of the men left on guard. Inside all was dark.

"A light here!" she cried.

As a man came forward with a torch, she snatched it from his hand, and entered the tent fearlessly. On the ground lay the other man, with all the ghastly signs of having been strangled visible on his face.

Neither of the prisoners was there.

"Fooled, and by such men as they are," was all she said at first.

The man by the tent entrance was yet alive. They poked him up, and with a little wine restored him to consciousness.

Lucia questioned him, and, at the outset, he was confused in his replies. He was attempting to conceal something. But in Lucia di Valo he had a cross-examiner of no common power. The truth had to be told.

Not thinking that their prisoners would attempt to escape—they had indeed lain down as if to sleep—the two men of the guard sat down, and sought to while away the time with gambling.

They had barely dealt the cards, when the speaker received a blow that stretched him out insensible. He knew no more.

The assumption was that one of the men had assailed him, and the other strangled his companion guard.

But the truth was that it was all the work of Storeby.

He had been brooding for hours over Mr. Farrell being taken in hand by Lucia di Valo and, ignorant for what purpose, conceived the idea that the school-master was to be spared and he and Turner sacrificed.

Brooding brought on one of his fits of ungovernable passion, and, rising like a demoniac, he dashed at the men on guard, struck one senseless, and throttled the other, Turner looking on aghast. Then he fled into the darkness, dragging his bewildered companion with him.

Of this Lucia knew nothing. It was, beyond the story told her, all surmise. One fact, however, remained: the men had been lax in their duty. That was an unpardonable offence, and the living offender was peremptorily ordered to be shot.

The wretched man threw himself on his knees, pleaded a wife and children in his Minorca home, and his faithful services in other ways. All in vain. Embittered by repeated failure, Lucia di Valo was deaf to his pleadings, and the man was doomed to die.

He was allowed until dawn to collect his thoughts and repent of his sins, and then the sentence was carried out. In the cold grey light of the morning he was led out with his arms bound behind him.

They stood him with back to a hole already dug in the sand; it was to be his grave. Vamos bandaged his eyes, and Lucia was there, with a cold, cruel face, to see her sentence carried out.

"Courage," whispered Vamos, in the ear of the doomed man.

The answer was a confused muttering, and he was left rocking to and fro upon his feet with the agony of the hour.

Ten men were chosen to fire upon him. Ten rifles taken by lot, and one of them with a blank cartridge.

Who had that to fire with was a matter of guesswork. Things were so arranged that each might persuade himself that he had drawn the blank weapon, and so was innocent of a share in his comrade's death.

For, after all, what had he done? Gambled when on duty. In faith, did they not all gamble at all times and seasons? It was hard. But the senorita was a woman with a strong will, and must be obeyed.

So at the word they all fired, and the unhappy man fell back in a heap into the ready-made grave. They just straightened him out, and then hastily covered him up and left him.

Vamos lingered beside the grave to the last.

"Surely," he muttered, as he looked upon the little mound of sand, "one has need of courage to marry such a woman. I had better have given my heart to a gentler nature. But, it is done. There is no going back. If I learn to hate her I must still feign loving, for her vengeance is a thing to be dreaded."

CHAPTER CLII.

SCOUTING.—A WILD BOAR'S RUN.



It was Morse who had blocked the cave. For the present it was shut against the outer world, and could not be reopened without considerable digging operations.

He had been induced to do it by the fact of the capture of the schoolmaster and his assistants being a too evident precursor to the betrayal of the castle. Experience had taught both Morse and Jim to realise that the schoolmaster would go to any length rather than suffer himself.

Therefore it was necessary to close the cave, and it was done. A little drilling on either side, three or four dynamite cartridges, and a handful of blasting-powder, and it was completed.

The dynamite ripped out the walls, and the powder blew up the roof, while Morse and Jim stood quietly within the cave watching the operation.

The work was effectually done. Morse had never, according to Jim, carried out a neater job.

The peace in the castle that night is now accounted for. Feeling perfectly secure against immediate attack, the leaders allowed all but the sentries to go to bed. But on the morrow a Council of Ten was called in the laboratory—for Jim now designed to take the initiative, and harass the enemy as soon as the position of Lucia's camp was definitely ascertained.

That it had been shifted from its original position he was certain, and Martin's report of the glow of light he had seen from the summit of the tower gave an inkling of the truth; but it was necessary to have the exact position of the foe known before assuming the aggressive.

All that had been done, and all that Jim hoped to do, was laid before the meeting in the accustomed terse, direct fashion he always adopted. All he wanted was two of his comrades to accompany him, and to start at once.

As all the members of the council wanted to go, lured on by a longing to get out of the castle for change as well as a love of adventure, the matter was settled by drawing lots, and the luck fell upon Ganthony and Dawson.

"Rifles, ten rounds of ammunition apiece, and revolvers," said Jim; "food for twenty-four hours. We may be obliged to make a night of it."

"Blow the luck of some people!" said Terry; "I particularly wanted to go. Dawson is short-sighted."

"Am I?" said Dawson. "Got sight long enough and strong enough to see through you."

"Your sight is all right, isn't it?" asked Jim. It was a matter he had never thought about.

"It is a little short, perhaps," replied Dawson, "but I can see as far as a rifle will carry, and that ought to suffice. If Terry wants to take my place he will have to fight for it."

"Come on!" said Terry, readily.

"No time for larking," said Jim. "Boys, we must start in half an hour. Morse, this to be kept from the women."

"Say that we have gone to gather acorns," said Dawson.

"Leave everything to me," said Morse.

In half an hour the trio of scouts were at the castle gates ready to start. Morse and Jim had a few whispered words to exchange, and when they were spoken Martin and Sleery drew back the platform on which the two guns rested.

Martin was of opinion that he ought to go, but Jim pointed out that it was probable that they would have to rely more on fleetness of foot than strength of arm, and boys were better runners than men any day.

So, with a word of adieu, they went forward, and passing along the front of the castle, entered the wood. Under cover of it they were going to make their way to the chine.

But Jim, not being gifted with second sight, could not know that, an hour earlier, Lucia di Valo despatched Vamos with five men to find their way to the back of the castle and survey the intermediate ground, to see if it would permit of the one cannon left to them being transported over it.

Unconsciously, therefore, both parties on the scout were approaching each other, and, satisfied of their being secure from assault, at least part of the way, made it more of a holiday outing than serious business.

"There goes a hog!" cried Ganthony. "Shall I let fly at him?"

"Wait, and see what ammunition we have left on our return," sententiously advised Jim.

It was a fine boar referred to by Ganthony, with tusks that would, properly applied, give a very ugly wound.

The brute stood at a distance of a hundred yards away, with his small eyes gleaming angrily. He was debating within himself the possibility of making a successful rush upon them; but as Ganthony put his rifle to his shoulder, feigning to shoot, the boar grunted and plunged into a small cave close by. Perhaps it might be better termed a hole, for it

descended at an acute angle into the ground, and was not more than five feet in diameter.

Curiosity prompted them to go up and peep into it, Jim advising his companions to look out for a rush, if it were very shallow.

But it must have been very deep, for when they got near they could hear the grunts of the boar far away down in the earth, and there was, besides, that curious humming sound, arising from the air-currents, scarce heard, yet definite, one hears in all such places.

"This is a discovery that may be useful," said Jim. "Let us mark the exact spot."

He drew his knife from its leathern sheath, and notched half a dozen trees round the hole. He reckoned it was about a furlong from the castle in a northerly direction.

Little as they thought of it, this divergence from their main course prevented a most untimely meeting with the scouts from the other direction.

While the boys were prying into the boar's haunt Vamos and his men passed a little lower down, and almost in sight of them. Nothing but a screen of undergrowth shut the boys out of view. Had they been discovered and taken unawares as they knelt upon the ground peering down the hollow, only one thing could have resulted. Each and all would have been shot.

But the Spaniards passed on unconsciously, smoking their cigarettes, and quieter than they had been hitherto, Vamos knowing they were approaching the castle.

Jim, having marked the spot, shouldered his rifle, and once more led the way.

They kept well within the wood for a time, with the slanting rays of the morning sun for a guide; but as the ground became covered with tangled bushes and wild vines they were obliged to bear down nearer to the cliff. There they came upon the trail in the long coarse grass made by the men who had recently passed that way.

Jim was no Indian to read a trail, nor were either of his friends gifted in that way. It was not in their line to tell whether it was man or beast who had left a record of his presence a short time before.

Nor could they tell which way the passers-by had travelled.

Still, it was clear that something or somebody had gone by, and Jim decided to follow the trail. It led him backwards, in a sense, and it led him towards the chine.

Presently the truth flashed upon him.

"It is some of the beggars on the scout," he cried, "and they've gone on to the castle!"

"Not many of them," suggested Ganthony, consolingly.

"We shall soon see about that," replied Jim. "I

reckon we are not half a minute from the chine now. Come on!"

"I thought so," he added, a minute later; "here we are. You remain here while I go forward, but do not quite lose sight of me."

Jim moved on, and the wood had now thinned so as to give a view of the summit of that side of the chine. Beyond the wood he stooped low, and finally sinking to his hands and knees, crept to the verge of the land and peered over.

He discovered that he was almost directly over the mouth of the cave, or where it had been, and the camp of the foe was visible on the right. There were a number of men moving about, and Lucia di Valo sat by her tent reading.

Thus was Jim made aware that if anyone had passed him—as the reader knows they had—they were but few in number.

The position of Lucia di Valo was very similar to that taken up by Espardo Reonardo in earlier days. Jim saw that, with a comparatively small force, he could, from the higher ground, play havoc with them.

But the attack, to be effectual, must be carried out in the daytime. At night they would have to fire by guess-work, which might result in nothing but creating a temporary confusion.

On the wisdom of attempting so much he decided to debate with his friends on his return. He was satisfied as to the position of the foe, and feeling he had a little leisure time on his hands, he merely wandered a part of the way back, and then called a halt for dinner.

"Well, Jim," said Ganthony, as he put out their simple repast, picnic-fashion, "what do you think of things?"

"It must be a bold attack on them during the daytime," replied Jim, "or wait for them to choose a time to attack us."

"Which do you suggest?" asked Dawson.

"Oh! go at them," said Jim. "I am getting tired or being cooped up."

"Most of us are, I fancy," said Ganthony, "but it isn't so bad as being coopered up, you know."

"Dry up, you fellows, for a moment," interposed Dawson.

He was standing in a listening attitude, with one hand raised. His companions were promptly obedient, and held their peace.

"Yes," said Dawson, in a low tone, "I may be a little short-sighted, but I have long ears. Somebody is coming along from the direction of the castle. I can hear a confused sort of jabbering."

They had chosen a spot not far from the edge of the cliff to rest. All round them were rocks and ferns and strong undergrowth. Twenty feet in the rear was the wood.

"Stow the grub away," whispered Jim, "and lie close."

This was soon done. The food was thrust into a hole hard by, and they inserted their lithe forms under a clump of rhododendrons, glowing with excitement.

As they got into position they each took a revolver from his belt, and cocked it ready for use. Their rifles were cocked and ready.

By this time the "jabberers" were near enough for all to hear their voices. It was Vamos and his party returning. Jim ventured up to the very verge of the clump of bushes, and saw them pass.

They were talking in a patois he did not understand. But the air of the men showed that Vamos was joyously explaining something that gave the others great satisfaction. They passed on, and their voices died away in the distance. Then Jim bade his followers back out.

"I wonder what their game has been?" he said. "Spying about the castle, I reckon. And that fellow seemed as if he had solved a riddle. Bring out dinner, Dawson, and let us make a smart peck of it, and then home."

They ate their frugal meal in a quiet mood, all with their ears intent on the sounds around them. But they were confined to the southing of the wind and an occasional cracking of a rotten branch in the wood.

"Confound it," muttered Jim, as they got up to go, "I wish I understood their lingo. Something is in the wind. It is a bit satisfactory to know that. We have not come scouting in vain."

CHAPTER CLIII.

ANOTHER SORT OF HOG.—THE MYSTERY OF IT.



THE boys hastened along, and presently came near the spot where they saw the hog disappear into the hole. Dawson ran on ahead to get a peep at it on the off-chance of dropping on piggy again.

"I may shoot now, I suppose?" said he.

"Yes," replied Jim; "only be sharp, and mind you do not miss."

Dawson was more short-sighted than he pretended to be, for at a distance of fifty yards things became somewhat misty to him. On getting within range of the hog's retreat, he saw something protruding from it.

It was not exactly like a hog, but it was moving—gliding into the hole, in fact. So he up with his rifle

and blazed away. The object vanished, and a muffled roar came from the opening. No hog ever uttered such a sound.

"Murder!" he exclaimed. "What is that?"

Jim came up and asked what luck he had.

"I hit something that was creeping into the hole," replied Dawson, "but it did not squeak. *It roared!*"

"Fancy," said Ganthony, who now joined them.

"Was it?" said Dawson. "I'm not troubled that way."

"Suppose we go and see what it is?" suggested Jim.

They went over to the place and listened. Somewhere far away in the depths of the cave or hollow there was a faint sound of moaning. But it might have been the wind.

When Jim peeped in he could see and hear nothing.

"You fancied it," he said, rising to his feet.

"It might have been the echoes of the report of the rifle?" hinted Ganthony.

"It wasn't," returned Dawson, earnestly. "I'll swear it was a roar I heard."

"It is all your blessed sight, coupled with a vivid imagination," said Ganthony.

"We must get along home," said Jim. He saw that it was time to stop a possible quarrel, for Dawson's cheek flushed and a combative line appeared about his mouth.

So they went on to the castle, Dawson grimly silent as he reflected on the nature of the sound he had heard. As they passed round the face of the building to the gates, he suddenly exclaimed:

"I have it!"

"Glad to hear that," replied Ganthony, sarcastically. "I thought that it got away from you."

"Oh, you are a chump," muttered Dawson. "It was a *human voice* I heard."

"You must have imagined that," said Jim.

"No," answered Dawson, "I am sure it was human; and, in a peculiar way, it was familiar."

"It must have been a new sort of hog," said Ganthony.

Dawson stuck to his text, but his companions could not believe he was right. They were unable to associate the affair with the presence of any human being. Who would have taken refuge in that cave? None of their foes, for instance, and apart from them, who could there be about on that part of the island?

"Say that one of the masters has escaped," said Jim, unconsciously touching on a fact, "why should they hide from us? No, Dawson, it won't do. You are mistaken. Gate there!"

A face appeared at the portcullis and vanished. Then the gate was opened by Terry.

"Sooner back than you thought you would be," he said.

"We have found out all we wanted," said Jim.

"Where is Morse?"

"In the cave."

"What is he doing there?"

"He said he was going to hunt up Chorker."

"I had forgotten him," said Jim. "What, Charley, old man!"

The bear came ambling up to him, as playful as a dog pleased to see his master returned. Jim patted the animal on the head and excited him to further demonstrations of joy.

Among his other accomplishments Charley could turn broad over heels like a street-arab, and he now went on ahead across the courtyard in a direct line for the big hall.

Unhappily, just as he arrived there Miss Elegantine was coming out. Charley's thick coat made no noise on the stone flags, and he arrived unexpectedly, so that a collision took place, with the result that Miss Elegantine was knocked down and rolled over.

"Murder!" she screamed.

"I am very sorry," cried Jim, as he bounded in and helped to raise her to her feet. "Most unfortunate you should be coming out just as Charley was going in."

"Drat the animal!" she exclaimed. "I suppose the next thing you boys will keep will be a waltzing elephant."

"I fear they are rather scarce," said Jim, gravely.

"I was coming out with the hopes of finding you. Eveline has been asking where you were."

"I have been out for a stroll with two of my friends."

"And strolling with guns and things. Oh! you boys! I don't believe you think any more of shooting a man than the sparrow did of killing poor cock robin."

"Where is Eveline?" asked Jim.

"Oh, it is really I who want to see you. I asked her when the next mail was going out, and she said she would ask you."

"We cannot send out any mail just yet," replied Jim. "Is your letter very pressing?"

"Well," said Miss Elegantine, "I have a cousin, a retired major of the Militia, and it occurred to me that if I wrote and told him of the trouble we are in, that he would send over a few soldiers, some of those idle Horse Guards, or some such fellows, to help us."

"I am afraid it would not be done," said Jim. "We are such an unimportant lot of boys. Do you know why most of us were sent here?"

"To learn, I suppose."

"No, Miss Dibble. Not so much on that account as to get rid of us, for a time at least. Two-thirds of us have no parents, the others have stepfathers or stepmothers. Things are a bit wrong at home, you see."

"And many of us," added Ganthony, "will come into money when we are twenty-one. But if we die before that time it will fall to the people who are kind enough to send us here."

There was something in what he said that suddenly blanched her cheeks, and she turned quickly away, saying that she would inform Eveline that there was no mail for the present.

"Twig that?" said Ganthony.

"You upset her," said Jim, absently.

"Yes, and with what? Now, poor old Dibble has always told us that he was living on the charity of his aunt. But I can see that he will have money if he lives long enough to inherit it."

"I would make sure of that before I said anything to Dibble about it," advised Jim.

Leaving the others, he went off to find Morse, rather expecting to find him in the laboratory. But he was not there.

The trap-door was open, showing that he was still below.

The day was now pretty well spent, and Morse had been away for six hours. It was a long time to be on such an errand, and Jim wondered what on earth had detained him. The lantern usually employed when wandering about the cave was gone, and there was none other available.

"He is gone a deuce of a time!" muttered Jim. "Surely old Chorker hasn't fallen foul of him. But no—he hasn't the pluck, and where would be the sense of it?"

After waiting the better part of an hour, and the twilight then beginning to fall, Jim returned to the hall, where the evening meal was being prepared. There was almost a full assemblage of boys, and Jim soon singled out Terry, and beckoned to him.

"Did Morse say how long he would be gone?" Jim inquired.

"No," replied Terry; "he merely said he was going below. Hasn't he come back yet?"

"No."

"Deuced odd, isn't it?"

"I don't understand it a bit. Chorker was no more than ten minutes' walk away. But, of course, he may have shifted his ground, and Morse is looking for him still. Still, some seven hours is a long time."

"There is a part of the cave unexplored, I believe?"

"Most of it, Terry. Indeed, we only know of one small portion of it. If Morse isn't back soon I shall be off to find him."

"We will go together," said Terry, and Jack nodded assent.

The evening meal was served and partaken of without any sign of Morse. His absence was not commented on. If any there besides Jim and Terry thought of it, the thinker would probably assume that

Morse was away on one of his many self-chosen duties.

Jim got more and more anxious, and as soon as he could leave the table without exciting undue attention he did so. Prior to going in search of Morse, he thought he would visit the ramparts and see if all was right there. Trimmer was on sentry at the gate, and he reported all well.

"The only thing that comes along," he said, "is a beastly draught through the portecullis. The wind has shifted to the south-west."

"Rain coming, perhaps," said Jim, peering through the iron bars. "The sky looks cloudy."

It was quite dark by that time, and the stars ought to have been visible. But he could see none of them. The wind, as Trimmer said, was blowing somewhat keenly, although it came from a presumably warm quarter.

The sougling of it among the trees had a most mournful effect upon the nerves. Jim, although not ordinarily impressionable in that direction, was moved by it.

"But how horribly mournful!" he said; "just like a dirge for the dead we read of."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Trimmer; "not for anyone here, I hope."

"Can't say," said Jim, as he turned away and ascended to the ramparts.

CHAPTER CLIV.

THE INTRICACIES OF THE CAVE.—A DISCOVERY.



MANY a time of late, both by day and night, had Jim looked down upon the scene below the castle walls. Of its beauty by day there could be no two opinions, and by night, as a rule, the soft shimmering of the sea could be seen, lying below like a pool of metal that had recently been red-hot, and had now lost almost all its glow.

Then above there were the stars, from whose sparkling the waters heaving below gathered additional light, and the trees could be seen in sombre outline, their delicate foliage traced against the semi-illuminated sky.

But now there were none of these sweet adjuncts of the night. Above and below all was gloom. Not a star visible, the area of the sea a blank, the trees blotted out.

Jim knew this would not be for long, because the moon would soon rise, and however thick the clouds,

some of her light would permeate through them. For all that, he felt as if the funeral pall overhead had some deep significance, and his heart became heavy in his breast.

He stayed there for a time, unheeding Felton, who paced to and fro, with rifle on shoulder, ears and eyes on the watch, and all the time wondering what ailed his young chief.

"You have heard nothing?" said Jim, suddenly. The abrupt manner of breaking the silence had a startling effect upon Felton.

"No," he answered. "Hardly expect it, do you?"

"No," said Jim, dreamily; "and yet I fancied a moment ago that I heard something—very faint—from the wood behind us."

"I heard nothing," asserted Felton, "and I was listening, too."

Jim put it down to fancy, and left the ramparts. Passing Trimmer, he bade him be on the alert. It was more of the casual way of speaking commanders have when passing a subordinate—a mechanical warning, rather than an utterance arising from the need of it. All who watched in the castle knew that on them the safety and lives of all might one day depend. Therefore, when on duty, they were ever watchful and wakeful.

Terry, acting on instructions previously given him, had smuggled a lantern into the laboratory, and was there awaiting Jim's coming.

"I believe it will burn six hours," he said, holding it up.

The lantern was an old one, and Jim looked at it dubiously.

"Say four, at the outside," he replied. "We must not be longer below."

They locked the door inside, leaving the key in the lock, and descended into the cave. Terry had been there before, but knew very little about it, beyond that there had been a straight passage to the mouth of it, and on the way two or three branches.

As they walked along, Jim told Terry of the scare he and Morse had given Chorker, which made Terry laugh aloud. But the sound of his voice raised such a number of uncanny echoes, that Jim begged of him not to laugh again.

"I wasn't troubled that way before," he said.

"The mouth being blocked up may have something to do with it," suggested Terry.

"I hope so," said Jim; "but I am as nervous as a kitten to-night. Now, here we are. This is the passage down which Chorker spent a few unhappy hours, and this way Morse naturally came in search of him."

"Suppose you try your luck by calling to him by-and-by," hinted Terry.

"Well, I don't mind if I do," replied Jim.

He put a hand to his mouth, and shouted:

"Morse! Morse!"

If Terry's laugh raised uncanny echoes, Jim's shout did worse. From a loud repetition of the word "Morse," the force of it died down, rose again, but not so loud, and so went on rising and falling, until the long series of echoes ended in a whisper.

"That sounds," said Jim, softly, "as if there is a perfect network of caverns here."

They went on, arriving in a few minutes at the spot where Chorker had been a prisoner. His late occupation of the spot was borne witness to by some crumbs of biscuit on the ground. A short distance further on they came to where the cast-off rope by which he had been secured was lying.

Twenty yards further on they discovered that the cave branched off in no less than five different directions.

"Hang it!" muttered Jim; "here is a poser. What is to be done now?"

"Take the one on the left, and go as far down as we can with safety, then return and try the next until we find him," said Terry.

"Find him!" groaned Jim. "I don't see much chance of that."

"Here, dash it! don't *you* lose heart," remonstrated Terry, "or I shall collapse."

"I am hardly myself to-night," said Jim, wearily; "got a weight on my chest I cannot account for."

The branch of the cave they now entered proved to be of a somewhat tortuous description. It wound to the right and left with the steady persistence of a huge corkscrew. But there were no sideways by which they might be misled when they sought to return.

The evenness of the windings at length struck Jim, and stopping for a moment, he said:

"Terry, this is no natural cave. It was made long ago, of course, but man had a hand in it."

"Just what I was thinking," said Terry. "Look at the roof. It seems to have been carefully rounded."

The roof was not more than seven or eight feet over their heads, and the light of the lantern revealed its smoothness. Still, the wonder was, why, if artificial, could not the makers have formed it straight?

But it was no use speculating upon it. Artificial or natural, it twisted and turned, and presently came to an end.

It was so sudden, at the very point of a turn—like the smaller end of a corkscrew—that Jim, who was a step ahead, was brought up short against a flat stone fixed in the clay wall.

There was no doubt about that being the work of man, for it was a perfect square, smooth and polished, and cut in the centre of it was a small hollow, just big enough to receive the hand of a man, and across

the bottom of that hollow was fixed a metal bar, to act as a handle.

Here was a discovery that for the moment drove everything else out of their minds.

Holding the lantern low, so as to get a good view of the stone, Jim said that the metal bar was of gold.

"It is dull, and there is a lot of dust on it, but there is no mistaking the genuine article."

"What is it for?" asked Terry.

"The handle, you mean. To pull out the stone with, I believe."

"See if it will come."

Jim laid hold of it and pulled with all his might.

The stone at first resisted his efforts, but eventually it began to slide out as a drawer from a table would do. It was about a foot thick, and through the opening revealed the boys peered with feelings of intense curiosity.

"Phew!" exclaimed Terry, "it smells like a charnel-house."

"Whatever it is," said Jim, as he pushed back the stone, "it must wait for the time. Morse is not there for certain, and he is what we have come to seek. The lamp will not last much more than another hour."

Terry was brimful of curiosity, but he suppressed it, and they came back to try their luck with one of the other branches of the cave.

CHAPTER CLV.

A FRUITLESS SEARCH.—THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS.



"It is no use," groaned Jim; "we must go back. The lamp is getting dim, and it won't do for us to be left in the darkness."

The four hours the lamp had been expected to burn were almost expired. The oil was low, and the

light was getting feeble.

And of the five branches they had only examined two fully, and part of a third.

The second branch ended in a mass of stones and rubbish, the roof having fallen in. At first they feared it was a recent affair, and Morse might be buried under it, but a cursory examination dispelled the fear. Many a year had passed by since the roof yielded and fell, for all sorts of fungi and other growths of damp and darkness were there in endless profusion.

There were even cobwebs also, although only the

most sanguine of spiders, starting business in a most unpromising district, could have woven them.

Of the third passage they had traversed but a small portion, when the light, as declared, began to give out. Back, therefore, they must go. And there was no time to lose, either.

Although Jim had no fear of his ability to find his way to the laboratory, he was not inclined to risk being left there in the dark.

It was so easy to mistake where one was. A casual movement might upset a previously well-conceived knowledge of a position in the darkness.

The lamp lasted until they were in the direct way, and then expired. But there was no possibility, save by the grossest carelessness, of missing the way now, and they reached the laboratory, worn out with excitement and very dejected.

It was now half-past nine, and the major portion of the boys had retired. Eveline and her mother were still in the hall. They looked surprised when the pair emerged from the laboratory.

"We have been looking for Morse," said Jim, as he gloomily sat down by the fire.

"What has happened to him?" asked Mrs. Farrell.

Jim explained everything, and there were general expressions from all who were in the hall.

"I try to hope," said Jim, "but on my life I cannot. I suppose I am getting a bit worn out with one thing and another."

"No wonder," said Eveline, with a kind glance at his meditative face.

All that could be done had been done, and they could only await the coming of the morning, when with more ample appliances in the way of lights and so on, the search could be resumed.

"If Morse is alive," said Jim, "he will be back before then. If he does not come, we shall only have to look for his body."

Eventually the party broke up, and Jim declared that he meant to get what sleep he could that night by the fire.

At half-past ten there was a change of sentries, and Changeling went on duty at the gate. Martin was appointed to the ramparts, and both came to Jim ere they went on duty.

"It's very bad," said Martin; "but Morse is such a clever fellow and so full of resource, that I am sure he will come back."

"My opinion, too," murmured Changeling.

"Thank you both," returned Jim. "I wish I could also think so."

They went out, and Jim made up a rough kind of couch in front of the fire. Then he piled on more logs and lay down to rest, but without any intention of sleeping.

But sleep he did in spite of his trouble, and the time

lagged on to midnight. Martin, on the ramparts, was walking to and fro sadly enough, when he heard a voice outside softly speaking.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Hist!" was the reply.

He knew the voice. It was that of Morse, and for a moment Martin was dumb with astonishment. How could Morse, who had disappeared in the cave, have got there?

It flashed upon him that it might not be Morse in the flesh, so prone are men to adopt a supernatural solution of an apparent insoluble mystery.

"Is—is it Morse, really?" he inquired.

"It is," was the reply. "Let me in. Quick!"

There was no need for Martin to think any more on the matter, and he promptly ran down the stairs. Changeling had already opened the gate. He had been a dumbfounded listener, and recovering himself—he was a very muscular fellow—pulled back the platform.

Morse came in with a staggering step, and would have fallen if Martin had not caught him in his arms.

"I am pretty well done up," he said. "Where is Jim?"

"In the hall, lying down. He has been in the cave, and could not find you. He is in a bad way."

"Help me in there, and get me something to eat. I'm only done up with fatigue."

Changeling closed the gate and gave his assistance also. When they got to the hall they awoke Jim, who was overpowered to find his friend before him. But Morse looked more dead than alive.

"Had a stiffish day," he said. "Will tell you more about it later on. No time to lose. As soon as I have something to eat, we must go to work."

"Work?" repeated Jim.

An affirmative sign was the response. Changeling bolted off to get some food, and was back in a trice with a plateful of meat and bread from the larder. Morse ate with the appetite of the starving. Martin meanwhile heated some water for coffee.

Morse soon began to recover. The colour returned to his cheeks and the light to his eyes. The coffee was speedily ready, and he drank some of it. Then he finished the food, and spoke in something like his accustomed quiet way.

"The laboratory," he said, "must be cleared at once. You can take out what little furniture there is. I will see to what may be considered the more dangerous material."

"Clear the laboratory?"

"Don't ask questions, Jim, but do just as I tell you. Afterwards we can sit down and talk."

If for a moment they feared that he was talking wildly, the thought was soon dispelled. To a great extent he had regained his coolness.

"Make no noise," he said; "but be as smart as you can."

CHAPTER CLVI.

WHY THE LABORATORY WAS CLEARED.



MORSE furthermore assured them that there was nothing to be feared from the front of the castle, and that sentry work could be abandoned for the night. He added that when the laboratory was cleared there would be more work to do.

They entered the laboratory, and he superintended the removal of everything. Some small packages he put in his pocket, others he carried outside and laid upon the hall dining-table.

"By-and-by," he remarked, "I will put them in a place of safety."

Several times while the work was going on he stooped by the trap-door and listened. Why he did this he did not explain. When he had removed all his more dangerous material, he bade them close the door.

"It is pretty strong," he said; "but a rifle-bullet will go through it."

"What do you mean?" asked Jim, bewildered.

"Martin," said Morse, "how long will it take you to cover it with sheet-iron?"

"An hour or two," replied Martin.

"You have the material?"

"Yes; among the stores."

"Go to work, then. Changeling, look up some bits of timber while he is doing it. The door must also be barricaded."

Changeling went off for the timber, and Martin departed to get the sheet-iron and his tools.

Jim asked Morse what it all meant.

"In the first place," said Morse, "I went in search of Chorker, and he doesn't know it yet, but I am aware that he has gone over to the enemy, and to-night or to-morrow he will bring them through the cave to force an entrance by the laboratory. If the fools had attempted it without my finding it out, they would have blown themselves and all in the castle sky high."

"But, I don't quite——"

"I went, as I say, to the cave to look for Chorker, thinking the old man had had quite enough of it, and I could not find him at first."

"But you have seen him, of course?"

"I tell you so. Well, it must have been some time early in the afternoon, when I heard a shot fired. It sounded a long way off."

"Yes," said Jim, getting deeply interested; "a long way off, in the open air."

"I imagined so, but could not be sure. I hurried on, and presently came to a long slope with a pin-hole of daylight at the summit of it. I immediately turned off my lantern, and then I saw a man rolling down the slope holding on to the calf of his leg, and swearing most bitterly. I recognised in the oath and tone of voice the Chorker I was seeking."

"I think I know who hit him," said Jim.

"Well, whoever it was seemed to have temporarily foiled him in a job he had on hand," continued Morse. "When he stopped rolling he sat up nursing his leg, and anathematising the shooter. 'Jes' as I was agoing off to blow on them 'ere young warmints,' I heard him mutter. Then it flashed on me that Chorker had discovered a way out of the cave, and was about going to seek Lucia di Valo to betray us, when somebody aimed a shot at him, and hit him in the calf of the leg."

"It was Dawson," said Jim. "But I will tell you how that came about by-and-by."

"I thought I had better hold back," resumed Morse, "and I kept quite still watching him as he bound up the wound, which appeared to be nothing very serious, if highly inconvenient. When he had done the job he got upon his feet, and hopped away up the slope again. I followed to see if he would be able to do anything more than limp and swear."

"Now, in not making myself known," said Morse, "I erred miserably. Seeing that he was lame, it never occurred to me that he could get away. He left the cave by a mere hole, and I soon afterwards peeped out. He was nowhere to be seen. Then I became alarmed, and went forth in search of him. Lame as he was he got clear away."

"I wish we had known who it was," muttered Jim; "but even Dawson could not tell. He saw something protruding from the cave and fired at it. Afterward, he heard a sound which he declared emanated from a human being. Ganthony and myself, like the pair of fools we are, refused to believe in it. We set down the noise to the grunting of a wild hog."

"I set out to find him," said Morse, "and found that he had gone along by a trail which I assume you and the others made. But I was so far behind him that I did not overtake him for a long time. When I eventually sighted him it was too late."

"He had reached the top of the chine," continued Morse, "and was standing there in conversation with some of those Spanish rascals. At the risk of my life—I don't want to make a song of that—I crept up

near enough to hear what they were saying. Chorker was offering to sell the castle and all in it."

"The skunk!"

"Yes, Jim, he is all that and more. The man he was talking to said that of himself he could do nothing. He must consult the senorita, he declared, and meanwhile Chorker must consider himself a prisoner. I prayed fervently that he might be shot or hanged forthwith."

"I should have done the same, Morse."

"It was then near the hour of darkness, and as they disappeared I felt I could follow. So I crept on, and from the top of the chine saw the camp of the senorita. Ten minutes afterwards it was wrapped in gloom. That was owing to the cloudy sky adding to the darkness."

"A blessing on it!" murmured Jim, "although, at the time I looked on it, it saddened me."

"To make my story short," said Morse, "let me briefly tell you that I succeeded in getting up behind the tent of that charming senorita with the fiend's heart in her, and heard her confer with Chorker on the way to get into the castle. He told her of the cave, of his confinement there, and the recent escape therefrom. He was willing to lead her through it, and to have his head blown off if he was not true to her cause. He also dilated on the many reasons he had for hating us."

"I wonder she listened to him."

"She had an object, Jim. Chorker was then taken away in the custody of somebody, and one of the men she addressed as Vamos remained behind to confer with her. For some reason, probably so that they might not be understood by their followers, they talked in French.

"Understanding the language," said Morse, after a pause, "I got at all they said. The senorita was satisfied that it was not, as she thought at the outset, a plot to catch her in a trap. Chorker she declared was too big a fool to be trusted with such a mission. She then dismissed the man, saying she must have time to think.

"And that is why," concluded Morse, with a lugubrious face, "I was so long in coming. I had to lie close until past midnight before I knew what she intended to do. Then she summoned her Vamos and bade him gather the men together, and they were to proceed in an hour with their villainous guide by way of the cave to the castle."

"And they are coming?"

"I must suppose so, Jim. I stole away at once and hurried on here. But I was so dead beat for want of food; and with the fatigue of the day, that I could scarcely crawl. But I knew that by taking the direct route to the front I should be here sooner than they."

"When will they be here?" asked Jim.

"Taking all things—the night, the road they have to travel, and the caution they will naturally use—I do not think they will be here before the hour preceding dawn. I listened at the trap more from nervousness than any real idea that they were so near."

"No hour is better for a surprise," said Jim.

Martin and Changeling by this time had brought along the different materials required, and the former began his task of covering the door with sheet-iron.

Jim suggested first fastening down the trap-door, but Morse said, "No. I want them to get into the room without suspecting they have been discovered. Finding the door fast will not surprise them. They will try to force it, and the moment they do that I am off again."

"Where to?"

"Ask me when I come back, Jim. Now, with your permission, I will endeavour to get a little sleep."

Jim having slept a bit, was as wide awake as need be, and he gave up his rude couch to Morse. Two minutes after lying down the tired youth was sound asleep.

Martin did his work without making much noise. Nobody in the castle besides themselves had the least idea of what was going on.

First of all he drilled a number of small holes round the edges of the three iron plates that were requisite to cover the door, and then through these holes he put in long and strong screws into the woodwork of the door.

Expert in all he did in that line, the job was completed under three-quarters of an hour, and then the barricading was done. When complete, it looked strong enough to resist any ordinary force.

"A steam engine at full speed," said Martin, "might break its way through. Nothing less."

CHAPTER CLVII.

THE COMING OF THE FOE.—MORSE DEPARTS ON ANOTHER ERRAND.



THEN ensued a time of waiting. Morse slept on peacefully, and the others in turn stole out to see

if all things were right in front of the castle, and to watch for the coming dawn. They also listened for some sound of the enemy having arrived in the laboratory, and heard nothing.

So the time passed and the dawn arrived. Jim walked in the courtyard, saw the first flash of it across the sky, and returned to his companions to announce

it. They spoke in a low tone, thinking it advisable. Martin, who was kneeling down by the laboratory door listening, raised his head and remarked on the stillness inside.

"They will not be here now," said Jim. "We have another day's respite."

At this moment Morse woke up, and, with a quick glance round, realised the position. Through the half-open door leading to the courtyard he saw the grey light of the morning.

"You have allowed me to sleep too long," he said.

"Nothing has occurred to disturb you," replied Jim. "Nobody has arrived."

Morse got up and surveyed the work done upon and outside the door. He expressed his entire approval of it.

"They will not force it in a hurry," he remarked.

"They must come first," said Changeling, with a humorous chuckle.

Morse knelt down by the door and remained there for awhile. At last he got upon his feet and said quietly:

"*They are there!*"

The startled look upon the faces of his companions might have been followed by exclamations of surprise, but he checked them with an upraised hand.

"Their game is to come upon us unawares," he said, "therefore they will make no noise. At this moment they are stealthily trying to force the door. They will fail, of course, or, at the worst, not succeed for some time. They can hack the woodwork to pieces with their knives, or beat it to pulp with the butt ends of their guns, but they will be wary of attracting our attention. They fully believe they have come upon us unawares."

"Well, what will they do?" inquired Jim.

"Give it up for the time and go back for some tools to force the door to-morrow night. In their innocence they will not make a disturbance now that daylight is here."

"And to-morrow?"

"We shall see. Now I am off on a little mission you shall know all about when I return. I never like to talk about anything until it is done, in case of failure."

"Is it anything we can do for you?" asked Martin. "Surely you will be overdoing it."

"I shall be back before breakfast," said Morse. "Now you must make arrangements for everything to go on as usual. There must be no examining the barricade, or even talking about it. The beggars must continue to think that the door is simply locked. Let me out."

They went out together and opened the gates. With the air of one going for a morning stroll, he sauntered out and disappeared.

"Curious fellow, Morse," muttered Martin; "he will make a wonderful man."

"Blessed if he don't give *me* the shivers," said Changeling. "What with one 'splosive and another, he will be lifting a town one day."

They returned to the hall, and shortly afterwards the relief sentries appeared, in the persons of Sleery and Felton. They were enlightened as to the fresh turn events had taken, and sent to their posts.

Then came Romeo and his progenitors, all of whom received facers from the news, but acted with commendable discretion. And so on until, in due time, all within the castle were aware of the facts.

"Let everything go on as usual," said Jim, in the words of Morse; "breakfast in the hall, and you will please laugh and chatter as usual. Be more noisy and merrier, if you like."

Miss Elegantine was positively the last down, and she had a question to put to Jim bearing upon a probability.

"Are those creatures armed?" she asked.

"Certainly," replied Jim.

"With rifles?"

"Some have them for a surety."

"Then," said Miss Elegantine, emphatically, "they will be firing through the door. And who, do you think, can eat and drink with that going on?"

This was a contingency, of course, but Jim assured her, on the faith he had in Morse's view of things, that it was not likely to happen.

"And as soon as the first shot *is* fired," he said, "we can clear out."

"Unless one happens to get the bullet," insisted Miss Elegantine. "I shall take my meals in the courtyard."

It was cold, but, imbued with a sense of fear, not unnatural under the circumstances, she put up with that. Choosing the warmest corner by the chief tower, she carried a stool there and partook of breakfast in solemn solitude, while the rest ate and drank and were fictitiously merry.

It was a serious thing—far more serious than anything that had happened before—to have the enemy fairly within the castle. Held at bay, it is true, but for how long? They all realised their peril, and Jim thought deeply over the matter as he sat at table.

Morse came in and quietly sat down by his side. Beyond a slight flush upon his cheeks there was no appearance of excitement about him.

"Give me some coffee," he said; "and what is that over there—cold pig? Send along some of it. I have worked up an appetite."

Jim, accustomed to his ways, merely asked him in an undertone if all was well.

"Yes, as far as I've gone," he answered, and turning to Terry talked about the beauty of the morning.

"The wind is dropping," he said, "and it will be almost like a summer day. Dibble, what is your aunt doing up in the corner there?"

"She's afraid of getting shot," replied Dibble, jerking his thumb towards the laboratory door.

"Her hair hasn't grown," remarked Terry; "at least, not quite so fast as she expected. I fear she will catch cold."

A guilty flush overspread the face of Dibble, which, Terry observing, brought him a ray of light.

"Dibble," he said, severely.

"Well, what now?" grunted Dibble.

"You needn't be so grumpy. Don't you feel ashamed of yourself? So kind an aunt, too. I wouldn't bone the wig of any woman, much less from so sweet a relative."

"Who says I've got it?" demanded Dibble.

"I do," replied Terry; "do you deny it?"

"Go and tell her, if you like," muttered Dibble; "it is in my box, at the bottom, under my linen."

Terry said no more, but as soon as breakfast was over he slipped up to the chamber where Dibble with others slept, coolly opened his box, took out the wig, and put it into his pocket. Then he went in search of Miss Elegantine, to see how the wig could be restored to her without doing violence to her feelings.

The boys were still in the hall keeping up the farce of fictitious merriment. Miss Elegantine was sauntering up and down by the ramparts, near the spot where she had breakfasted.

Terry put on an air of being sent on some very important errand, and strode across the yard with his eyes fixed ahead. She saw him, but that was all. With nimble feet he ascended to the top of the tower and cautiously peeped down. Miss Elegantine was still marching to and fro, and alone.

The wind was so light now that it would hardly have fluttered a feather. Terry felt that he could safely drop the wig without fear of its being blown away. It had a solid foundation, being one of the old-fashioned sort, and in the still air it would fall like a plummet.

He held it over and let it go. Down it went, alighting close to Miss Elegantine's feet. Terry only waited to see her start of surprise. The after bewildered glance around he lost.

"Bless me!" cried Miss Elegantine, "where did it come from?"

It was to her a mystery of mysteries.

But she was wise in her generation, and, for the sake of comfort, placed it on her head.

She, however, covered it with the shawl she had worn for some time past. The growth was *too* sudden to be immediately revealed.

"It's been blown about by the wind ever since I

lost it," she said, "and is now miraculously restored to me."

It was not possible for her to suspect anyone, not even the hapless Oscar, whom she found in the hall when she passed through.

Terry came in soon after her, and proceeded to work upon Dibble.

"If I were you," he said, "I would just confess to my aunt what I have done, and give her back her wig."

"I think I've worried her enough," Dibble admitted; "by-and-by, I will go up and slip into her room. She may make what she likes of finding it there."

He went at once to carry out his purpose, and speedily returned to Terry with an alarmed face.

"Somebody's boned it!" he said.

Then, seeing the grin on Terry's face, he became irate, and accused him of stealing it.

"I wish you would let me alone," he said.

"And if I did," demanded Terry, "where would you be? How about my saving you from having a tooth dug out with a pickaxe, or something that way? Now, I've simply given your aunt her wig with Mrs. Farrell's compliments, and left them to fight it out. There will be a scratching match before the day is over."

"You never did *that*?" gasped Dibble.

"Well, if you want to stop the fight," evasively replied Terry, "you had better confess what you have done, and take the licking you have earned. Anyway, keep clear of your aunt to-day. Go and live at the top of the tower, and I will bring your tommy to you, and feed you like a wild beast."

While Terry was worrying Dibble, Morse was explaining to Jim what he had done.

It was a simple, daring thing to do, and on the lines he had worked hitherto.

"I have been up to that entrance to the cavern in the wood, and *blocked it with a bit of melenite. The whole of our enemies are boxed up in the cave.*"

"Boxed in?"

"Yes, without food or water. But they haven't found it out, I guess, just yet, for when they get there they will think they have come the wrong way, and try the rest of the passages. When the truth does burst upon them they will come back mad."

"And then?"

"Well, they will have to come out, if they can get out," Morse said: "but I hope we shall be prepared for them."

"There is one thing we have to think of," mused Jim; "suppose only a portion of those fellows are here?"

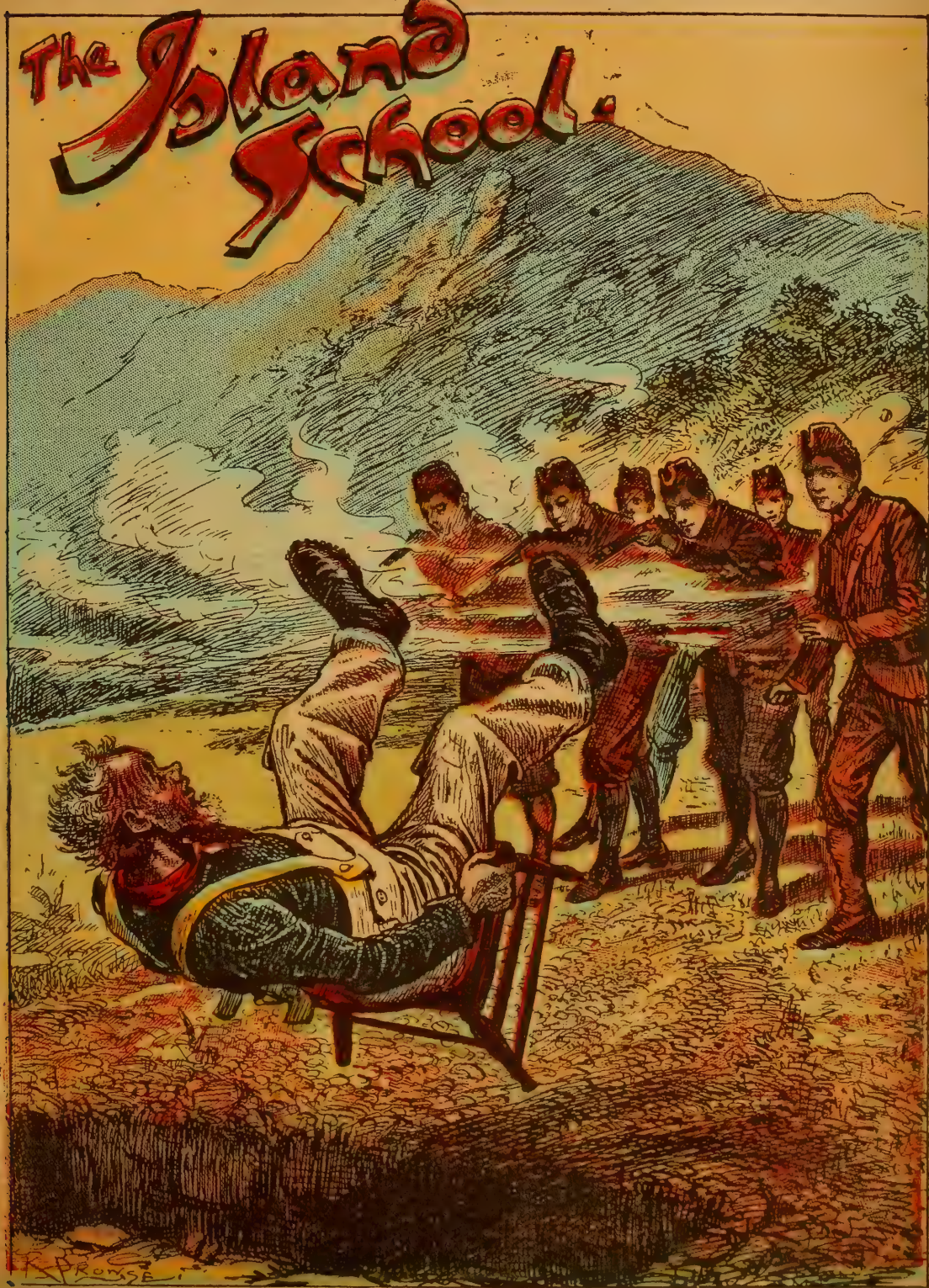
"They are *all* here. I am sure of it."

Morse was very positive on this head, and repeated, "Sure of it—I have the whole of them, and unless

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.

The Island School.



The execution of the traitor—Chorker!

there is a way out of which I know nothing, they must come out by the laboratory door."

"A hundred men or thereabouts?"

"There will not be a hundred of them two seconds after the door is opened," remarked Morse, with a grave face. "Jim, it is not our doing, and their blood be upon their own heads. Perhaps it will not be necessary to kill many of them. The rest may lay down their arms."

"You propose to fight them?"

"Some of us," said Morse. "For the women there is one way of escape. They must, when the supreme moment comes, retreat to the lagoon and take to sea. I propose that Changeling should go with them to manage the boat. I have another plan, but I am sure you will not assent to it."

"Let me hear it," said Jim, "and then I will tell you what I think of it."

"I do not like it myself," said Morse, "and yet not for my own sake; although it will involve my giving my life for you all, I will gladly do it."

"Not to be thought of," asserted Jim, "not for a moment. But to satisfy my curiosity, give me your plan."

"When those fellows begin to attempt to force their way through," said Morse, "I thought that all but myself might retreat to the sea. There are boats enough for all, and the prospect of being picked up is not very remote. Anyway, the island would be safe for you, for I, who would be left behind, would blow those rascals and myself and the castle to the winds."

"That such a sacrifice might be consented to in case of urgent need, I admit," said Jim, "but lots ought to be drawn for the one on whom the task is to fall."

"No," returned Morse, "it must be done by one who understands the work and *would not lose his nerve*. I should not, but I would not trust anyone but you, Jim, and you are not to be thought of."

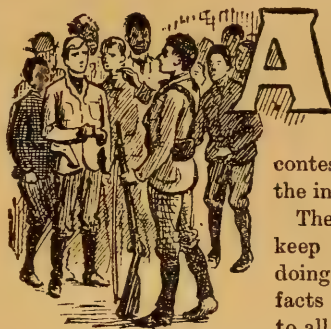
"Nor you either," replied Jim, "so there is an end to that for the present."

Nevertheless, the idea of one being sacrificed for all haunted him. It was a scheme that commended itself to his high notions of a noble spirit. There was something more than noble in it. It was passing the generosity of man. But Morse to be sacrificed—never!

"He will be a great man in the world if he lives," thought Jim, "while I—well, I may be a bit of an adventurer, and nothing more."

CHAPTER CLVIII.

THE COMMOTION IN THE LABORATORY.



A SUPPRESSED fever lay in the bosom of the castle. All felt that the climax of the contest between them and the invaders was at hand.

There was no need to keep the secret of the doings of Morse, and the facts were communicated to all.

But through the day there was no sound from behind the barricaded door.

A council was called, and all, including the women, were invited to share in it.

By a general vote Jim took the presiding seat. Briefly he explained the plans laid down by himself and Morse. That night there was to be no undressing, and the women were to be ready to depart at a moment's notice. Mrs. Farrell demurred, but Jim said it was imperative.

"You will only hamper our action," he said, "through our anxiety on your account."

The force of this observation was not to be gained. Then a question was put to the boys as to whether they would prefer to go with the boat or stay. There was no hesitation in the reply. All would stay and, as they expressed it, "see Jim and Morse through the affair."

Then came the question of provisions in case the defenders should deem it necessary to retreat, and it was decided that the three negroes should at once remove a portion of the stores outside the castle, there to remain ready for transport when the word was given.

The bulk would have to be left behind.

Then there was something to be done in preparation to give the enemy a warm reception if they succeeded in breaking through the door. What men of their stamp might do in the circumstances they were placed in it was impossible to say. Perhaps they might give way to despair and fight like so many caged wolves. But the probabilities were that they would endeavour to force their way out.

With a view to being early prepared for them, the evening meal was arranged an hour earlier, and with appetites more or less impaired it was partaken of. The fictitious mirth had come to an end. Grim silence for the most part prevailed.

Eveline sat with her eyes on Jim most of the time,

much as if she were about to part from him for ever. He affected to be quite at his ease, smiling when their eyes met. But her response was a feeble one.

The meal was almost over, when there was a blow upon the door of the laboratory as fierce as it was sudden. It made the hearts of the majority leap to their throats. Miss Elegantine uttered a loud scream, and Eveline clutched her mother by the arm.

"Do not be agitated," cried Jim; "we have plenty of time yet."

The blow was followed by a perfect storm of beating upon the interior part of the door, expressive of savage ferocity and despairing men.

"They know the worst so far," said Morse, gleefully. "Now, ladies, it is time for you to go. Changeling, if you wish to take anything with you, get it together."

"We shall none of us want much," said Mrs. Farrell, "for if not rescued before darkness, we shall return to the shore and camp."

"Camp on the rocks on the other side of the lagoon," advised Jim; "you will find some sort of shelter there."

Elaborate leave-taking there was no time for, but Jim snatched a moment as Eveline was putting on her hat and cloak, to say a few words of adieu.

"Do not fear for us," he said; "we shall come through all right."

"I hope so," she answered; "do not run any needless risks."

"Certainly not," replied Jim, with a quiet smile.

Their hands met in a warm clasp, and then he left her. Changeling, with several rugs and a parcel or two for the ladies, was ready. So was Sleery, similarly burdened.

Miss Elegantine took an affectionate leave of her nephew, who said "He was all right," and looked rather sheepish. He had not got over the wig business, but happily his aunt knew nothing of the truth.

"If anything happens to you," said Miss Elegantine, "I shall never forgive myself."

"Oh, yes! Certainly not! Walker!" muttered Oscar, who had, perhaps, good reason to know the full measure of his aunt's affection for him.

The party left the hall to the gruesome music of the battering on the door, and just as they got outside, the first shot was fired.

"Blaze away!" cried Morse, "you will soon get tired of that unless you wish to smother yourselves. There is no outlet for the smoke."

This was found out ere long by the cooped-up men, not half of whom could possibly get into the room. Some must perforce remain below, on the steps leading to the cave, or in the cave itself. Three shots only were fired, and then the battering was resumed.

Relieved of the presence of the women, Jim set to work in earnest.

The doors leading to the kitchen and the upper rooms were closed, and having strong locks which had been well oiled since the schoolboys occupied the place, the keys were turned and taken out.

"As quiet as you can be, all of you," was Jim's next command.

They were silent instantly, and stood about awaiting the next order.

"Rifles and ammunition."

The three negroes assisted in bringing them out, and Jim directed that they should be taken to the courtyard. That done, the kitchen door was also secured, and he motioned for all to get clear of the hall.

Morse was otherwise engaged, and when the boys poured out, they saw him and Martin dragging "Betsy," the small cannon, across the courtyard. "Bella" had been posted under the arch on the opposite side by the great gates, and facing inward. Thus were the plans made pretty clear to the lookers-on, and the wisdom of the boy leaders was much commended.

"I see," said Terry. "When those fellows break through they will hear the voice of 'Betsy,' and, cooped up in the hall, she will speak to some effect. Then, if obliged to, we shall retreat to the entrance way, and, as they come on, introduce them to 'Bella.'"

"And after that?" asked Trimmer.

"The rifles, and a hand-to-hand fight perhaps with the rest of them."

It is not to be wondered at that the boys drew deep breaths as they listened to a fair description of the probable course of action. It offered the elements of a fierce excitement they could not have borne if they had not been gradually hardened to it by their previous experiences.

Morse personally loaded the cannon, and it was placed in position just within the doorway, and aimed at the point by which the men must force an entrance.

But Jim had more in his mind's eye. While Morse, kneeling, fired the cannon, he proposed for himself and half a score others, posted immediately behind him, to pour on the enemy a withering fire. No doubt it would be destructive, but with so many brought against them, they could not hope to destroy more than a third. The rest would come on because they had no choice in the matter.

There was no way of retreat, and to remain where they were was to die like sheep in the shambles. All this was in the mind of the keener intellects among the defenders, but one and all prepared to face it.

"Listen to them," said Morse, as he rose to his feet. "They have done some execution, but are not yet through the woodwork."

The battering on the door became deafening, and, in addition, those not employed in the labour, encouraged their companions with shouts and cries.

The din was awful, and full of threatening sounds of a coming struggle.

CHAPTER CLIX.

THE BREAKING OF THE DOOR.—"BETSY" SPEAKS.



HERE was no light left in the hall. Even the fire had purposely been allowed to die down to a few glowing ashes. Outside, the night was descending. Resting on their rifles, the boys talked in whispers. Martin and Trueberry, the only two men left,

stood by Jim, who leant carelessly against the doorpost, apparently wrapt in thought.

Hamlet, Macbeth, and Romeo were outside awaiting the command to shift such things as they had removed from the castle to the lower ground.

At intervals, while there was light enough, Morse looked to the cannon to see if it were properly sighted. It was more for something to do than from the necessity of it.

Bang, bang! incessantly the riot inside went on, save when there were short pauses, originating in the shifting of the gang of toilers. The screeching and shouting never ceased. The rifles of the defenders were loaded. Nothing was left undone to open the active part of the fight with fitting vigour.

"They have splintered away most of the woodwork," said Morse, after they had been waiting an hour or more. "Twig the difference in the sound? They are striking metal now, and it is the barricade that keeps the door fast."

It was so; but even that would not stand for ever. Strong and desperate men were endeavouring to break through, and it was odds on their doing it.

But there was only sound by which the measure of their success could be estimated. The darkness of the night lay on the hall. Outside it was only relieved by the stars shining into the limited confines of the courtyard.

The chosen riflemen moved up to their posts. Jim took up his weapon and asked if all were ready.

"We fire," he said, "then, Martin and Trueberry, you run back the cannon. We who have emptied our rifles will back to the rear and reload. The others will then come to the front and fire. Divide yourselves into two companies so that we shall have time to reload. No haste. Move slowly across the

yard unless they make a rush. Then retreat as quickly as you can. We are not strong enough to stand up against heavy men."

"Hush!" whispered Morse; "there goes one of the sheets of iron."

It slipped down, as he spoke, behind the barricade, and fell, with a clatter, upon the floor. There was no light to show the opening that was made in the door, but the watchers could tell it was there by the increased volume of sound. One plate gone the breach was made, and the others would soon follow.

Motionless stood the boys in the doorway, unseen by their foes. Their presence was not, at the time, suspected. It was believed that, having shut up the invading party, they had retreated from the castle. Therefore it happened that the one consuming thought of Lucia di Valo was to get out of their place of confinement.

It had been almost unbearable at the outset, and, as time wore on, it became necessary for those in the room to change places with those below. There was a measure of fresh air in the cave, but in the laboratory there was none.

Now that a hole had been made in the door, the welcome fresh air poured in, and the heated men were heard expressing their thanks in various ways and in different *patois*.

But still the foremost worked on. The second plate was wrenched off, the breach in the door widened, and then there was a pause.

"Courage, my children!" cried Lucia di Valo from the rear. "We shall soon be free. Then we will have rare sport torturing the dog who has brought us into this trap!"

Here the voice of Chorker, in a very choky state, was heard asserting, with great vigour, his complete innocence.

"Is it likely," he asked, "that I should bring myself into a trap?"

"I cannot tell," answered Lucia di Valo. "You Englishmen do strange things."

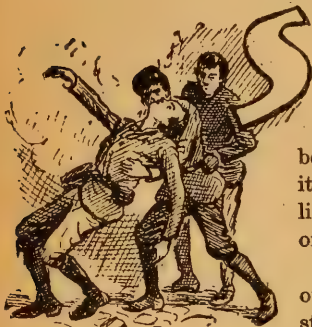
Then she called on her men to resume their labours, and the third plate was removed with exultant cries. The shattered woodwork fell in, and the key pieces of the barricade, lately resting on the door, collapsed. The rest was scattered right and left, and the horde of ruffians began to pour through.

"Now," said Jim, and, with a roar, "Betsy" spoke.

Scarcely had her voice roused roaring echoes in the hall, when the rifles were fired, and the flame from their muzzles lighted up the interior of the huge hall.

In the midst of the smoke a crowd of the foe was seen standing aghast, staring wildly about. Several had fallen, and in the laboratory there was a seething mass of wounded and terrified men.

CHAPTER CLX.

THE RETREAT TO THE GATES.—TURNED TO MADMEN.—
RETREAT.

O vivid a picture, notwithstanding the smoke that seemingly dimmed it, those who saw it had never before beheld. It fixed itself upon the brain like a flash of lightning on a dark night.

There was the horror of it, too, for these youngsters were no lovers of bloodshed for its own sake. The carnage they wrought had been compelled by self-defence. It was for them to slay or be slain.

Jim was appalled, but he kept his head clear. Much as had been done, there was still an overwhelming force to contend with. It would be madness to stay there.

He gave the word, and the first rifle-party retreated to the rear. Then the second emptied their weapons into the hall.

A sputtering fire of pistols answered, and Waller fell heavily against Ganthony, who threw his arm around him.

"Are you hurt, old fellow?" he asked.

There was no reply. So, as he retreated in his turn, he dragged the still form of the boy with him.

The despairing yells and cries of rage in the hall reached the height of riotous sounds.

Back the boys retreated. Three times they fired ere they gathered under the covered way by the gates, which were thrown open.

"Away you go, there!" cried Jim to the negroes, and each took up a big bundle and they went staggering down the shattered pathway.

"Better if it had not been broken up now, Morse," said Jim, grimly.

"Perhaps not," was the quiet response.

"Waller is hurt!" sang out Ganthony, "and I cannot bring him round."

"Pass him into the open air," said Jim.

He had his own work to perform, and that duty was done by Whiffer, Ganthony, and Felton.

They carried out the lad and laid him down upon the ground, to the left of the bridge.

"Shot through the forehead!" cried Felton, aghast. "He is dead!"

"What is that?" sang out a score of voices.

"Waller is killed!"

A great cry went up from the boys, and the madness of the battle-field, roused in the soldier's breast as he sees his comrades fall, came upon them. It was as if fire had suddenly swept over their heads, heating their blood. Until then they had hardly realised what one feels in warfare. There was a rush forward, with cries of "Let us get at them!" but Jim stemmed the torrent.

"What are you doing?" he cried. "Back! and stand out of the line of fire!"

They heard his voice, and it stopped the rashness of the moment. Then a dreadful stillness came upon them, and it brought out the voices of their foes, who were still in the hall.

Above all they could hear Lucia di Valo rallying her men.

"You came out to fight," they heard her say.

"Surely if one falls there is no need for all to fly! And whither would you fly? Follow me, and I will lead you to victory."

"No; I am the leader now," said Vamos. "It is not fitting that a woman lead the way. Comrades, the boys have fired their last shot and fled. If we hesitate they will get away, and shall we not avenge our dead comrades?"

There was a pause, and then a responsive cry in the affirmative, and then the men came pouring out into the courtyard. Again they were deceived. They could not see the peril at the postern gate, and were not prepared for it.

The tactics adopted before were repeated. Morse fired the cannon, and the first lot of rifles were discharged. Then, according to Jim's original plan, they ought to have retreated, for it must of necessity be a backward running fight until the enemy was so reduced as to be practically powerless.

But a sudden inspiration came upon him as he heard the words of Lucia di Valo and the threatening cries of the foe. The sounds they uttered were more like the ravings of madmen than ought else, and it seemed as if they had completely lost their heads, for instead of rushing forward to force the position of the boys, they ran to and fro in the courtyard without any apparent aim or purpose.

Then it was that the idea of a stealthy movement came to Jim. His followers were again quiet, and rapidly the command was softly passed round.

"To the ramparts, but make no noise."

It was as dark as the depths of a cavern by the portcullis, owing to the night and the smoke that hovered about; but all knew the way, and rapidly they mounted up the stairs. Whatever little noise they could not avoid making was drowned by the fierce cries of their antagonists.

Jim waited until all were gone, and then followed his friends. Guessing his object, they were all seated

on the ramparts, well out of sight of anyone below, and still as mice.

"Keep as you are," he whispered, "until I know what they will do below."

He just lifted his head over the corner of the back parapet, and looked into the courtyard. The sight he beheld was suggestive of whirling shadows accompanied by unearthly voices. Above it all, however, he could now distinguish the clear voice of Lucia di Valo. She was trying to rally her disorganised horde of ruffians, and her efforts were seconded by Vamos.

Presently the turmoil began to subside, and many of the men who had sought refuge in the hall came out again. Jim's eyes growing accustomed to the gloom, he could watch their movements with tolerable clearness of atmosphere to assist him.

They were gaining confidence, as he thought they would, by the cessation on the part of the boys of active warfare.

"Are you men," Lucia cried, vehemently, "or children? The cubs of the castle"—she put as much contempt into the words as she could muster—"have resisted as far as they are able, and fled. Will you let them escape, knowing that I have sworn not to leave one alive to tell the tale of their defeat?"

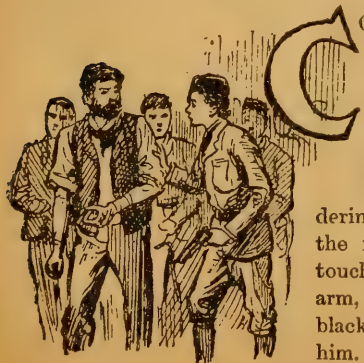
They answered her with cries of vengeance. On they rushed to destroy the "cubs of the castle."

Vamos forced his way to the front and called upon them to follow him, and once more the horde of rascals gained heart, pistol in hand, and brandishing their knives. Some had rifles, but these weapons being inconvenient when the men were closely packed, they wore them slung about their shoulders.

All that were capable of movement hastened through the gateway to the outside of the castle, Lucia di Valo walking in the midst of the throng, encouraging her men with the words and actions of a fury.

CHAPTER CLXI.

A SUCCESSFUL DODGE.—MADDER THAN EVER.



COMPLETELY successful," muttered Jim, as he rose to his feet.

His companions looked at him anxiously, wondering what would be the next move. He touched Martin on the arm, and signed for the blacksmith to follow him. Together they

vanished down the dark stairway.

"What can he be scheming?" was the thought that passed through the minds of many. Morse had a shrewd suspicion of what was going to be done, and a smile—sad in a measure, though—passed over his face.

The followers of Lucia di Valo were not far away. Not having any clue to the direction they supposed the boys were taking, they were gathered together by the Redan, the graveyard of many of their countrymen.

Lucia di Valo knew it but too well; and even in that hour of excitement she could not keep from the grave of Espardo Reonardo. But it was not to shed a tear over him. She was in no weeping mood. She stood by the mound and renewed her oath of vengeance with all the venom of a woman in her bitterest hour.

Vamos, with a party of men, hastened to the back of the castle, but only to speedily return and report no sign of the boys. It was practically at the same moment that Martin returned to the ramparts.

"Trueberry," he said, "you are wanted below. Boys, it's the captain's orders that you thin out some of that lot below."

"Take it coolly," said Morse, as the eager boys began to clamber to their feet.

The movement of the youngsters must have been heard by Lucia di Valo, although she was unable to locate it, for she was heard calling for silence. The buzzing of voices among her men subsided. Strange to say, no one looked aloft. They turned their eyes to the right and left, before and behind them, and saw nothing.

"They are not far away," said Lucia, "for I heard footsteps a moment ago."

Along the whole length of the ramparts was a line of boys, each, as he carefully thrust his rifle over, taking aim at the thick of the dimly-seen group.

Thirty rifles in all.

"Fire!" whispered Morse.

Almost as one, the muzzles of the rifles sent forth their fire. Right into the thick of the thrice-startled foe sped the bullets, riddling some through and through.

Unconsciously, most of the boys had aimed at the centre of the group, some more directly than the others; and the effect was that the centre practically received the whole charge.

Half a dozen men received the thirty bullets, and dropped down lifeless where they stood.

As for the rest, this was to them the greatest surprise of all. Indeed, they had no definite idea where the firing came from, until the loud cheers of the boys upon the ramparts revealed the truth.

Then it became known to them how they had been fooled, and a tenfold fury laid hold of them. Vamos

cried to them to return to the gates, and the bolder plunged with him in that direction, only to find them fast.

As they retreated, another withering fire from the ramparts laid more of them low, and the survivors, yelling with impotent rage, dashed down the broken pathway.

They disappeared, and although they could be heard stumbling about, cursing and groaning, Morse bade the boys reserve their fire.

"We must not waste our powder," he said; "it may be wanted yet."

Elated with their success and the temporary defeat of the foe, the boys cheered again and again, their voices ringing far away on the night air. The castle was free of them, of all save the dead and wounded. They would now have to be thought of and seen to.

The temporary excitement of victory over, the memory of their lost comrade, Waller, again came to the front, and Ganthony recalled the fact that they had left his body outside.

As there was no need for him to remain on the ramparts—nor, indeed, for others, save a watcher or two—he hastened down below, where he found Jim Gordon, Martin, and Trueberry refixing the cannon upon the platform by the gates.

"Poor Waller is outside," said Ganthony.

"We brought him in," replied Martin. "You will find him in the courtyard."

"Get some lights as quickly as you can," sang out Jim. "Here is the key of the door leading to the kitchen."

Felton took it, and, with half a dozen more, went off for the requisite lamps.

"Wounded snakes bite," cautioned Morse.

"All right," replied Felton; "I'll keep an eye on them."

This was in allusion to the possibility of some of the wounded, if any remained alive, doing the boys an injury.

Felton had a box of matches in his pocket, and lighting one at the door, he was able to see his way across the hall. He could make out that it was a frightful scene of confusion and slaughter, but he did not stay to look into details.

Having unlocked the kitchen-door, he passed on with his companions. The lamps were kept in a cupboard outside the kitchen-door. As the first was lighted, they heard somebody calling out, as if for help. Amazed, they stared at each other, until Trimmer, who was one of the party, suddenly remembered.

"It is the two wounded fellows," he said. "They were somehow forgotten."

And so it was. Not a living occupant of the castle

had, during the preparations to resist the attack, bestowed a thought on Harac or Maravello.

Both were up and trying to get out of the room in which they had been lying. But the door all through had been kept fast on the outside, as it was not certain how far the men might be trusted.

Felton opened the door, and seeing their scared faces, bade them not be alarmed.

"The fight is over for the present," he said. "Your friends got into the castle, and we had some trouble to get them out again."

"No friends of mine," said Maravello.

"Nor to me," grunted Harac.

"Friends or foes," said Felton, with a grim smile, "many of them will trouble you no more. There are a number of them lying in the hall. Go back to your beds. I must leave you now."

He turned away without closing the door, and, with his companions, hastened back to Jim. As before, they did not stop to see the amount of damage and loss of life to be found in the hall. They could do nothing, and their movements were quickened by a groaning here and there.

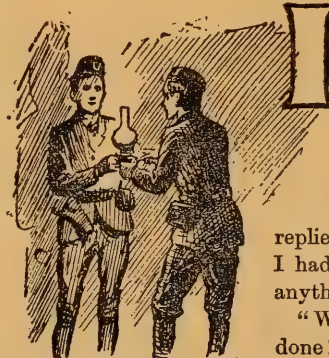
A few minutes after they were gone, Harac and Maravello came creeping in.

And they stayed in the hall, stealing from one fallen man to the other, occasionally muttering to themselves:

"It is something, and we owe them much. We cannot repay them in any other way. Why should the dogs live?"

CHAPTER CLXII.

ANXIETY FOR THOSE AWAY.—AN OLD-TIME VAULT FOR THE DEAD.



"I SAY," said Felton, as he handed the lamp he carried to Jim, "you forgot those two fellows lying abed by the kitchen."

"I did," candidly replied Jim; "and I wish I had not made a mess of anything else."

"What else have you done?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter."

He had in his mind the little boat-load upon the sea, and, in a secondary sense, the trio of negroes who had departed with the bundles of supplies.

Taking to the ramparts was entirely an afterthought, and totally at variance with the original

scheme he had in his mind. Now, as it were, he had his enemies between him and Eveline.

He devoutly hoped that Changeling had succeeded in stopping a passing vessel, but the time had been short ere night fell, and the probability was that they were camping on the island, by the mouth of the lagoon.

If so, what were they thinking of just then? They must have heard the firing and the riot of the fight. It could have been heard perhaps far away to sea. Jim would have given something off his life to know for certain what had become of them, and if on land, to send a comforting message to Eveline.

As regards the three niggers, he relied on the cunning and sagacity of Romeo to keep them out of mischief. At all events, if they could find a hiding-place, they would not starve.

"I suppose most fellows would forget something," he thought, as he looked over the renewed arrangements for the protection of the castle.

It was now time to turn their attention to the hall and the laboratory, where the greatest havoc had been made. This was a duty that Jim took upon himself. Martin was left on sentry at the gate.

On the way there he stopped and looked at poor Waller, over whom someone had laid a white sheet brought down from the chambers. He turned it back, and by the light of the lamp surveyed the still face.

"As if asleep," he said to the group that gathered round him. "He looks as if he had gone away from us to the land of everlasting peace."

"Has he any friends who will miss him?" asked Pesketh, who had been more intimate with Waller than most in the school.

"A brother, I have heard. An elder one who inherited the family property. Waller was dependent on his bounty, and perhaps he will not be so much missed."

"Some of us may have cause to envy him ere long," remarked Lal Brodie, sadly. "I don't mind confessing that I have had almost enough of fighting."

Jim restored the sheet to its place over Waller's face, and walked on to the hall. Lamps were lighted by this time, and the chaotic conditions of things revealed. The shattered door of the laboratory, the *débris* of the barricade, the broken seats, and huge dining-tables overturned, represented the inanimate, and that which had been animate was so no more.

Lying here and there were nineteen men in every attitude expressive of a violent death. Harac and Maravello were no longer in the hall. In the courtyard there were almost as many more, and of all these not one was found breathing.

"I don't understand this," said Jim; "look at this fellow. He has a bullet in his arm. I don't see any other wound. Surely he did not die of that!"

"Fright, perhaps," suggested Stiff, who was kneeling beside a swarthy fellow, lying with his face to the stone flooring. "Here is another. Splinters in his legs. I can find nothing more."

So they went from one to the other. The majority had wounds that undoubtedly accounted for their end, but at least ten out of the number had died in a manner unaccountable to the boys.

But all they could do then was to lay them out decently in the courtyard, and then put the disordered hall straight.

Sleep was not to be thought of. With bucket and mop, the flooring was swabbed and cleansed, and the shattered woodwork taken away and stored with other timber for firing.

In the hall and kitchen fires were lighted, and groups were gathered about, both discussing the events of the night, events that were never to be eradicated from their minds. Now and then one would go out and visit the sentries. But the only report brought back was that nothing of importance had been heard or seen of the enemy.

Some hoped that they had driven them away, but the wiser heads were shaken in dissent.

"They are strong still," said Morse, "and, with their blood up, will give us more trouble."

"I should like to get hold of that villain Chorker," said Terry.

"I would not touch him with a pair of tongs," said Brodie.

Chorker was not among the dead or wounded, and as he was known to have been among their foes, the boys assumed that, unless he were lying outside with the fallen there, he must have got away.

It is needless to say that they were all very bitter against the miserable old traitor; but the peculiar thing was that many said they would not have been surprised if Mr. Farrell had done it.

This is an illustration of the depth to which the schoolmaster had fallen in the estimation of the boys. There was no apparent deeper depth into which he could sink.

After the intense excitement languor was inevitable. It came upon the boys in turn, and some of them fell asleep by the fire. Others, wiser in their generation, towards dawn stole away to bed. Thus by degrees stillness fell upon the castle, and when the morning sun cast its first rays upon the summits of the towers, of all there was not half a score stirring.

Jim stood in the courtyard surveying the solemn scene. Near him lay close upon forty men who the day before had been instinct with life. Foes they were living, but, now they were dead, foes no more.

He could not think ill of them at that hour, and he wondered how many of them had friends who would mourn for them. Then came the thought, "What

would have been the result if these men had fulfilled their diabolical purpose?

Not forty men, but sixty boys would now be dead. Jim was certain that no mercy would be shown any who fell into the hands of Lucia di Valo or her crew. In that thought he found reasonable excuse for the share he had in the taking of life.

"A necessity created by themselves," he murmured, "nothing less."

But what was to be done with them? They could not be left where they were, or cast outside like rubbish to lie and fester in the sun. To one and all decent burial must be accorded. But where?

It dawned upon him that at one time, when the castle was a century or two younger, there must have been warfare and a siege. Morse had often pointed out signs of both. Then there would be the dead to dispose of within the walls, and, with searching, the place might be found.

Alone he wandered about the lower part of the castle, penetrating into dank little holes and corners where he had never been before. It was singular, but true, that, although it could not be doubted that in Espalmador Castle, as in other similar places, there must be dungeons and subways for various purposes, neither Jim nor his friend Morse had so much as thought of looking for them.

Now that there was urgent need for some such place, Jim set out alone upon the search, and he was not long in finding what he wanted.

In the dark recesses of a dismal little hole of a place under the staircase that led to the upper chambers he came across a small, stoutly-made door. It was closed, and held fast by sundry rusty bolts, which he eventually succeeded in forcing back. Then he called to Lal Brodie, who was close by, to find Morse and ask him to bring a lantern with him.

While he was gone Jim prudently left the door open to let out the foul gases that must have accumulated below. Presently Morse, accompanied by Brodie, appeared.

"What do you want, old fellow?"

Jim explained. Morse said he had been thinking over what ought to be done, and agreed with Jim that there might possibly be something that would serve as a vault. They had better look for it without delay.

Lal Brodie asked to be allowed to accompany them, and the trio descended a flight of dank, damp steps together.

The first level they came to must have been fully thirty feet under the flooring of the castle. It was a gruesome stone vault, with the inevitable cobwebs, some big and black enough to have been hanging there for centuries. Hopping about the floor, they espied several enormous toads.

"How do these things live here?" asked Lal, with a shiver.

"They keep their secret close," answered Morse. "Nobody knows, and yet they must live here as they do in similar places, and I daresay would consider themselves hardly treated if we removed them into the sunlight and purer air. Places of living are a matter of use and taste."

At the upper end of this vault they found a doorway, with the door hanging on its hinges, leading to another, and here, to their surprise, they discovered a number of vats, stone jars, barrels, and bottles, filled with what appeared to be wine, packed away in bins.

And the work of the ubiquitous spider hung over them all.

"No burying-ground here," said Lal Brodie.

"We have not been everywhere yet," said Jim.

The wine-vaults were very extensive, and three in number, but only the first they entered appeared to have been in general use. The others were given over to the storage of empty tubs and general rubbish.

Beyond this they came to another door, on which was a brass plate, dingy with the dust of time, but with an inscription fairly definable.

"I can't exactly read it," said Morse, after peering at it for a while, "but I can make out words that clearly show this is a resting-place for the dead. They had queer notions in the good old days."

Close by it were some rusty crowbars, and with the aid of one they succeeded in opening the door. Doffing their caps, they entered.

A glance sufficed to show that it was indeed the family vault of the now forgotten owners of the castle. Ranged upon strong shelves on either side were coffins of marble and stone—some of a size that showed they were occupied by once mighty men, and others, ranging down to the puny coffin of the infant.

It was not inviting, and the boys, satisfied they had found what they were seeking, hastily departed to make arrangements for the speedy interment of the slain.

Without coffins they must be placed there, all except poor Waller, for whom they determined to do their best to provide one.

"Phew!" gasped Morse as they reached the upper air. "Fancy being shut down there for a week."

"All well" being reported by the sentries, the rest of the youngsters were pressed into the solemn service of carrying the dead below.

Steene and Whiffer undertook to have the coffin for Waller ready in two hours.

On the rest of the solemn work we need not dwell. It was an uncanny task conveying those fierce swarthy-looking corpses below.

But on one thing of interest concerning it we must dwell. Both Morse and Jim observed it, and they

commented upon it when the last man was taken down and only Waller remained.

"Did you notice anything peculiar about some of the dead?" asked Jim.

"I did," replied Morse.

"What was it?"

"They had the appearance of having been *choked* to death."

"Just so. I distinctly, in three or four cases, saw marks of fingers on the throat."

"How came they there?"

Morse could only shake his head by way of reply. It was past his comprehension, he finally said.

"Unless," he added, "their friends killed them to save them from falling into our hands."

"That won't do," rejoined Jim. "There's another solution of the mystery."

And there was, destined to be afterwards made clear to them.

Later in the day poor Waller was carried below, and they laid him in his rough coffin upon a shelf above a huge stone sarcophagus, elaborately carved, and evidently the last home of some man of importance.

"Things might have been worse," said Jim. "Some people would think we have got lightly off up to the present, but it was hard to lose one of us."

There were not many dry eyes when they left the vault; but great grief is happily transient, and before the day was gone some of its deepest shadow was lifted up. There was so much to do, and in occupation the boys found relief from their gloom.

CHAPTER CLXIII.

LUCIA DI VALO'S LAST CARD.—TO DO OR TO DIE.



WHEN the full measure of defeat was known to Lucia di Valo she retreated to the chine, and there awaited the coming of her followers who survived. In the last rush from the victorious youngsters' fire the men had scattered, and been divided during the hours of darkness.

In the grey light of the morning Lucia di Valo stood by her tent with Vamos. Hard by, engaged in raking together materials for the fires, were about twenty men. These, up to that time, were all that she had seen after the defeat and rout.

"There must be many more left," she said to Vamos.

"I have lost many good men, but not so many as this scattered band would show."

"More will return, doubtless," gloomily replied her lieutenant. "But it was a terrible slaughter, seeing that we made no return."

"It was a series of surprises," rejoined Lucia, "either wonderfully well planned, or the result of a series of fortuitous accidents."

"What will you do now?" asked Vamos.

"Do? Why, collect our forces, and seek a better opportunity to *destroy* the cubs of the castle."

"The men may not be disposed to fight."

"They must. Do you know what will be said of them, if they return like whipped dogs with their tails down?"

"They will be treated with contempt, perhaps. But they are not responsible for defeat."

"Who is?"

She asked the question curtly, with her eyes angrily fixed upon him.

"I had no faith in approaching the castle by the cave," he said. "Had we taken time, and posted our remaining cannon in the rear, where we could shield ourselves from attack by the wood, we could speedily have battered down the wall. After that the time to enter would have been our choice."

"You would put the blame on me, you dog!"

"Senorita, I am no dog."

"Hark you!" said Lucia. "I will have no rebellious conduct from you. Your duty is to obey *me*, and see that the men are faithful. If you forget your duty, and lead them to neglect theirs, I will charge you before Don Carlos Espardo with having sold the expedition to the enemy."

"You would never do that, surely," he said, with perspiration breaking out upon his brows.

"I would," was the cool reply, "and come to see you through the *garrote*. You know me, and can judge if I will keep my word."

She turned from him, and, entering her tent, shut herself in. He wiped the dew from his forehead, and walked slowly towards the nearest fire.

"And she would do it, curse her!" he muttered; "and to think that I joined this unlucky venture to win her love. Love! She knows nothing of it. But for me there is no going back. While she stays I must remain. Better die here from a bullet or a knife than have to suffer the *garrote*."

The arrival of three more men, looking as if they had been wandering all night, distracted his attention from his own troubles. On the principle of easing off the insults or wrongs by one too strong to show resentment to, by pouring out the vials of anger on a weaker vessel, he asked them angrily where they had been.

"Somewhere by the sea," they answered, and he

showered on them bitter language and threats. By-and-by others appeared, some in twos and threes, and some alone. To each and all the promise of being garrotted if they dared to return to Minorea was given. In short, the threat of Lucia was shifted to them. In all about forty-five men turned up. Whether there were any more alive on the island was a question none could answer.

But whatever their future course, it was evident that there must for the present be a short rest. The men wanted it, and it would put a little heart into them. This much Vamos ventured later on to suggest to Lucia di Valo.

"Let them take three days," she said, "and then, oh, valiant and wise Vamos, *your* plan of attack shall be tried."

He understood the vein of sarcasm in her words, but made no retort. But he was bent upon carrying out his plan, and he believed it would be successful.

He knew, with good reason, if he could once get at the boys on even terms, that even now the victory would be his. But it was not for love of Lucia he laboured now.

That was all dead within him. Her overbearing ways and cutting remarks had destroyed it. He feared her, but he did not love. To save himself from the imputation of being a traitor, absurd as he knew the notions of the old governor to be, he was bent on succeeding where Lucia had failed.

Then if she offered him her love he would be in a position to refuse it, a proceeding which, in his present state of mind, he believed would give him infinite satisfaction.

CHAPTER CLXIV.

WHERE IS CHARLEY?—THE TRAITOR COMES TO LIGHT.



"I HAVE been looking everywhere," said Terry, the next morning when he met Jim coming from the ramparts, "and I cannot think what has become of Charley. There are no signs of the intelligent brute."

"Strange," replied Jim; "I had quite for-

gotten him."

So, it appeared, had all but Terry. In the heat and excitement of the fight, and the gloomy duties of burying the dead, the bear had been forgotten.

Nor could anyone recall having seen him imme-

diately before the fight. He was not slain, in the castle, anyway, for if he had his huge carcass must have been easily found. A suggestion that he might have taken refuge in the cave was negatived by Morse.

"The way was barred by the enemy," he said, "and the trap-door after the fight was found closed. Charley is not there."

"And if he were he would not remain there," said Rainstone.

Eventually it was supposed that he had got out of the castle when the gate was left open for retreat, and taken to the woods. As he had been absent two days very little hopes of seeing him again were entertained.

And now upon all in the castle there settled a shadow, arising from a growing distaste for longer confinement within its walls. The knowledge of the vault below peopled with the dead helped in its development, and although there was no general superstitious fear of ghosts, the uncanniness of living over a resting-place for the departed could not be denied.

Some of the wine was fetched out of the cellar, but what it was none could tell. It was, from age, almost tasteless, but at the same time it was an intoxicant, Dibble, having incautiously imbibed two glasses—or rather mugs, for they did not use glasses—expressed a desire for his aunt's immediate return.

The ferocious way in which he expressed his wish led to Trimmer asking him what he would do to his aunt when she did return.

"I shall kill her on the spot!" was the fierce reply.

Then he got up and executed a war-dance, defying all the world to stop him. But Morse and Terry, as representing mankind, sufficed to check his antics and to put him to bed.

After this Jim locked the cellar, declaring there should be no more of the wine used, save for sickness.

Harac and Maravello left their room on the second day, but a strange feeling of repulsion kept the boys from associating with them in any way. Nothing was said to account for it, and the men showed themselves humble and grateful, but there was something that led to their being viewed with mistrust.

In the absence of the negroes they were, however, useful. Maravello proved to be an excellent cook, and Harac a splendid drudge. They laboured early and late, doing more work than the three niggers had ever performed in three days.

Retaining the room they had occupied during their sickness, they were not far from the kitchen. In the middle of the second night Harac was awake by a smashing of crockery. In a moment the half-caste was out of bed, his knife was ready to his hand, and without waiting to put on any clothes, he darted into the kitchen.

It is not clear what was in the mind of the man; possibly he thought that Lucia di Valo and her men had come back again. But the kitchen was dark, and there was nobody stirring.

Puzzled, he waited for a time, but there came no sound. Then thinking he had dreamt the noise, he returned to his bed.

In the morning, on entering the kitchen, he found a basin that the night before had been full of soup, and safe upon a shelf, lying in the middle of the floor shattered into a score of pieces.

Now, if the basin had been lying close to the shelf there would have been nothing very marvellous about it. Things have occasionally slipped from shelves in a most unaccountable manner. But the inanimate is not able on its own account to *jump*.

Nothing else had apparently been disturbed. Harac called Maravello, and putting their heads together, they tried to get at who it could be.

It was not the boys, that was clear. What on earth was there in the kitchen to lure them into it in the middle of the night? Nor was it the men, for they would not have bolted away after what was evidently an accident.

Who or what, then, was it?

"We must watch," said Maravello. "We owe it to those who spared our lives when they could justly have hanged us."

Gratitude was the mainspring of their actions now, whatever their previous acts may have been from an ethical point of view.

During that day there was no movement of importance in the castle. From the ramparts nothing was seen of the boat that had taken Eveline and the others away. What had become of it was doubtful.

Two, or three vessels passed at a distance, but that was all. Upon the land no movement of any sort was discerned.

That night, when all was quiet, Harac and Maravello crept out of their room, and hid themselves under the kitchen-table. They were of the material to make patient watchers, and for two hours they scarcely stirred. Then a slight shuffling sound was heard from the direction of the hall. They nudged each other, and drew their knives.

A stream of light flashed out near the doorway, and by its aid they saw no less a person than Chorker standing there with a lighted match in his hand. He was a stranger to them, and they knew he had come for a forbidden purpose. What it was they were not interested in.

It was clearly their duty to kill him.

Chorker, after looking about him and seeing nobody—it never occurred to him to look under the table—threw the end of the match down, and in the darkness stole into the kitchen.

A moment later he was seized by the ankles and thrown violently upon his back. He gasped out an appeal for mercy, but the knife of the half-caste was already at his throat, and he would have been killed but for Maravello, who interposed.

"He speaks English," he said; "he may be one of our friends."

Chorker caught the last word, and hastened to declare that he *was* one of their friends.

"All I want," he said, "is a crust of bread."

Maravello passed a hand down his arm, tracing the box of matches he still held tightly between his fingers. He wrenched it away, and bidding Harac hold him fast, struck a light.

Rising to his feet, he lit a lamp that stood upon the kitchen-table.

"Let us see him well," he said, laconically.

Holding the lamp aloft, he closely scanned the features of Chorker. They were strange to him.

"I do not know you," he said.

"But everybody else here knows me," said Chorker. "I'm one on 'em. You may let me go."

"No let go," replied Harac. "Keep you, and show you to the captain in the morning."

"All right!" groaned Chorker.

It was his one chance of life, and he embraced it. But Maravello was still of opinion that there was something wrong in his being there, and he determined to securely bind Chorker. So they got some cords and bound his legs and arms. Then they carried him to their room, and kept watch over him through the night, taking that duty in turns, one sleeping in snatches while the other was left on guard.

Chorker felt he was in a parlous fix. He was not sure how much of his evil conduct was known, but he feared, in his natural cowardice, that the truth had come out. If so, what would Jim Gordon and his friends do with him?

There was no sleep for the wretched old man that night, and the hunger which had brought him to the kitchen vanished. Fear for once effectually destroyed his appetite.

Jim was always up early, and as soon as it was daylight he was informed of the capture of the traitor. Both Harac and Maravello were immensely gratified by the approval he expressed of their conduct.

"You have done me a very great favour," he said, "and I shall not forget it."

Then he went on to the room where that unhappy old rascal lay still securely bound.

CHAPTER CLXV.

TRIAL AND SENTENCE OF CHORKER.



CHORKER had been thrown upon the bed, where he lay on his back like a log, utterly unable to move. He heard Jim's light footstep, and, guessing who it was, prepared himself for cross-examination. He had arranged a line of defence—in fact, several, which was a mistake. When

a man makes up his mind to tell a lie he ought to have a tolerably good one ready, *but no more*. In the multiplicity of falsehoods there is ruin.

"Morning, Mister Gordon," he said, "hardly 'spected to see me here, did you?"

"No," briefly replied Jim; "what have you been doing with yourself?"

"I didn't do it. Two furriners tied me up."

"I don't mean that, and you know it. Where have you been, and what have you been doing?"

"Well, I went away, as you heerd on, no doubt," began Chorker.

"Yes, Romeo told me you were gone, but not until you had been away more than a day. He did not tell me *how* you went."

"I hopes he ain't been telling no lies," said Chorker, with a virtuous air; "it is so easy to get a man into trouble."

"I only knew from him that you were gone—no more," said Jim.

"He may, now I'm come back, not stick to the truth."

"He is not in the castle, and not likely to be for some time. He is gone away."

"Well, I come back the way I went," said Chorker, "by a kind of rope ladder hung from his winder. Having done with it I cuts it free, then comes on to the kitchen to get something to eat, when them two parties falls upon me."

"And is that all?"

"All, Mr. Gordon, as I'm a sinner."

"What have you done outside?"

"Nuthin' but wander about and lose myself."

"Then you don't know there has been a terrible fight here, and some forty men slain?"

"Now I come to think on it," said Chorker, with an assumption of being candid, "*I did* hear a bit of firing going on, but in course didn't know the per-ticklers."

"Strange!" exclaimed Jim. "I suppose you would like to get up?"

"I should sir, unkimmonly."

Jim removed his bonds and walked out of the room. Chorker sat up free, almost overwhelmed with relief.

"Hain't got the least wrinkling of what I done," he muttered! "*I am* in luck. Now I'll jest go inter the kitchen and get a bit of wittles."

Harac was there, and on seeing Chorker free, he was much surprised. His face showed that he felt he had made a mistake.

"Now, you worm," said Chorker, haughtily, "I've seen the captain, and his orders are that I'm to have something to eat. Arter breakfast I'll see what can be done in the way of hauling you over the coals. What yer mean by dropping on me as yer did larst night, eh?"

"I did my duty," replied Harac, with a frown. "It was late—you had been there the night before—you were a stranger, and you came to steal."

"What!"

"To steal, I say, both nights."

"I warn't there the night afore."

"If you were not, who am it?" asked Harac.

"Gimme my breakfast," said Chorker, turning aside all discussion for the present.

Harac gave him some bread and meat, and made him some coffee. He partook of all, ravenously. Sated at last, he swaggered out to the courtyard, where the boys were strolling about. He expected to be chaffed, and, perhaps, bullied a bit, and he was prepared for either. Neither jokes nor insults break bones. But he was not prepared for being received without any sign of recognition. And that was the way he was treated.

The youngsters walked about in twos and threes, chatting among themselves, but not one so much as looked at him. He stared in utter amazement, and, finally, strolling as far as the platform by the gate, he found Martin on duty. Here again there was no sign of recognition.

"Wot's the game?" demanded Chorker.

Martin turned slowly on his heel and walked to the courtyard entrance, where he stood watching the boys.

"This is a nice sort of reception," whined Chorker, "after all I've gone through."

Still not a word, and hot with anger and trembling with undefined fears, he hastened to the ramparts. There he found Dibble on guard.

Again that mysterious ignoring of his presence.

He gave Dibble good-morning, and for all the notice taken of him he might as well have addressed the stone walls.

"I suppose it's the latest game," he sneered; "you are a wonderful lot, suttinly."

The call to breakfast caused the courtyard to empty, and Chorker sauntering down to it, walked to and fro for a while, alone. Then he strolled into the hall and looked about him.

Not one seated there returned his gaze, and a feeling of the whole thing being unreal took possession of him.

He did not doubt his own living personality, but those with whom he was now in contact. Often in a dream he had found himself so ignored by persons dreamt of, but the fear that he was now in the society of so many *ghosts* began to lay hold of him.

He knew there had been a big fight. He was, in a sense, in a part of it. But he did not know how it terminated, for long before the end he had managed to sneak back into the cave and there he had been in hiding until his last excursion to the kitchen led to his capture.

Was it possible that he had fallen upon the spectres of the dead? He glanced round with a frightened air, but immediately afterwards there was a break-up at the table. None of the boys left the hall.

Chorker would have done so, but he was suddenly seized and pushed back into a chair. Jim was standing by, and to him he appealed.

"Mister Gordon, put a stop to this 'ere sort of thing. My narves, arter wot I've gone through, ain't equal to it."

"Be silent, if you please," said Jim. "Wait until the table is cleared."

"But *what* are you going to do?" Chorker asked.

"Try you for desertion, and selling us to the enemy," was the answer.

He fell back in the chair, staring wildly about him.

Jim gave directions for the table to be rapidly cleared, and the court to be formed.

On the faces of all there was a solemnity that boded ill for the man about to be tried. His feelings were of a nature not to be described by an ordinary pen or tongue.

It appeared that arrangements for the proper constitution of the court had already been made, for, on the table being cleared, Jim took the head as president or judge, and twelve others, mainly selected from the Council of Ten, ranging themselves on either side, acted as jury. Jim opened the proceedings by calling upon the prisoner to take his stand at the lower end of the table.

Chorker looked round him in vain for some evidence of his being the victim of a jest. Whatever was about to be done, the boys were in earnest. Martin and Trueberry acted as warders to the prisoner, each bearing a rifle.

Jim, in measured terms, began the accusation. In plain terms he set forth the facts as they had succeeded each other from the time Chorker left the castle. He

did not pretend to know how that wretched man found the entrance to the cave, but contented himself with the statement that he was there, had been seen by Dawson, wounded by him in mistake, afterwards discovered by Morse in the cave, and his villainous arrangement with the enemy overheard.

To Chorker every word was a sting, but, with the fatuity of an ignorant man, he still hoped to escape punishment by telling falsehoods.

"What have you to say to all this?" asked Jim.

"I told you the truth when I said I got out of the winder," answered Chorker, with dry lips.

"But how about coming back the same way?"

"The truth also."

"Chorker," said Jim, "all this will not avail you. Do I understand that you returned here this morning?"

"Suttinly," was the prompt reply.

"Were you not in the kitchen the night before last? There is a very humble witness against you in the form of a broken basin. Why not admit the truth, man?"

"I niver meant to sell you," said Chorker, wildly. "If I talked to them parties it was for to deceive them!"

"But you sought them out."

Chorker had no answer ready. He stared here and there, avoiding Jim's eye, and at last opened his mouth as if he had a defence to his actions. But he was dumb.

"I will take the verdict from the jury in writing," said Jim, after a long pause. "Each will please write it on a piece of paper, fold it up, and pass it on to me."

This was done amidst a stillness that permitted of the breathing of the prisoner to be heard. It sounded like the puffing of a small steam-tug heard from a distance. The pieces of paper were passed up to Jim, and one by one he read them out.

"*Guilty!*"

From the first to the last the verdict was the same. Chorker shiveringly heard the solemn record given out.

What was to follow? He wondered what sentence Jim would pass upon him. But Jim was not going to take the responsibility upon himself. Again were the jury of twelve called upon to give their opinion. This time it was to be upon the nature of the punishment to be meted out to the prisoner.

Again they were unanimous.

"Death!"

The record was unanimous.

One by one the words of condemnation were read out. Chorker listened with a frozen face, and, contrary to what might have been expected of him, made no sign. He merely stood still, staring blankly before him.

"To be shot to-morrow at sunrise!" said Jim, solemnly. "Prisoner, have you anything to say why your punishment should not be meted out to you?"

No reply. He looked at his warders and smiled in a curious way.

"If you have nothing to say," said Jim, "you can be removed. Martin, take him away to a place of security."

Martin touched Chorker on the arm, and wheeling, he mechanically followed him from the hall. He was conveyed to the room he used to occupy, and the men in turns undertook to keep watch over him.

"It ain't no use speaking the truth," he moaned, as he threw himself down upon the floor, "and they ain't got no right to shoot me. It's murder!"

"Get up, man," said Martin, sternly. "What did you care about their lives when you did your best to sell them? Why should they care about yours?"

"If they'd been killed it would ha' been in fair fight," groaned Chorker.

"Nothing of the sort. You and that precious lot had arranged for a night surprise. Half of them would have been murdered in their beds."

He bade Chorker get up, and assisted him to rise. Limp as a broken doll he sat in a chair, moaning and bewailing his hard fate.

But he could still eat, and partook of his dinner and other meals that day freely. Towards night he settled into a state of sullen despair.

Trueberry took the early night watch, and he had some trouble with him, for suddenly he burst out crying, and implored the man to fetch Jim Gordon, "who was that kind-hearted he would see how cruel it was to shoot an innocent party."

"If you were innocent," replied Trueberry, "you would not be here. It is no use fetching Gordon. He has made up his mind what to do with you, and nothing will turn him from his purpose."

Chorker ran up and down the narrow confines of his prison, stopping now and then to beat the walls with his fists. Trueberry looked on with satisfaction.

"You have a right to suffer," he said, "and you earned it."

Then Chorker whined out an appeal to be let loose, to run wild in the woods, and whatever he endured he would never trouble them any more. All he wanted was to live, if it was only as a dog. But Trueberry only smiled and told him to prepare for the worst. After that Chorker became sullen again. He did not get a wink of sleep that night.

When the dawn was at hand Martin was on duty, and he bade Chorker get ready. There was a footstep outside, and Jim entered the room.

"It is time," he said to Martin.

"It can't be!" shrieked Chorker. "Gimme another hour!"

"Not a minute," replied Jim.

"But I ain't had no breakfast," pleaded Chorker. "You wouldn't shoot a man before he's had anything to eat?"

"We have no food to waste," said Jim. "What use would breakfast be to you? In five minutes all will be over."

"I can't walk," moaned Chorker, and indeed he lolled so limp in his chair that it was probable he spoke the truth.

Jim walked into the passage and called for Harac and Maravello. The two men came out of the kitchen, and he bade them carry Chorker in his chair outside the castle.

Then a big bell began to toll.

"We found it hanging in a dark corner of the tower," explained Jim, "and it has come in handy for this morning."

"You ain't got no feelings to tell me that!" shrieked Chorker. "Spare me! *I am guilty*. There! You can't want more than that? Make a slave of me. Whip me, half-starve me. Do what you like, only let me *live*!"

"Bring him along," said Jim.

Harac and Maravello unceremoniously hoisted the chair. Martin, with his rifle handy for use, fell in behind, and Jim led the way to the hall.

There the boys who had formed the jury on the previous day were assembled with rifles on their shoulders.

"The firing-party," said Jim.

"Oh—oh—oh!" groaned Chorker.

On through the courtyard, with the firing-party leading the way, they went. The gates were open, and outside all the rest of the boys were drawn up in two lines about fifteen feet apart.

At the top of the lane thus formed, close to the Redan fort and graveyard, was a long, narrow hole. Chorker saw it, and by its shape guessed what it was for. It was his grave.

"Help!" he shrieked. "I—I—"

"Silence!" cried Jim. "Place him there by the grave—in his chair, if he won't stand. Leave him—that's it. Firing party, to your places."

They ranged themselves at the bottom of the lane. Chorker made a feeble effort to get out of the chair. But he was past all that, and he did nothing but roll about.

"Ready, there!" cried Jim. "*Fire*!"

The rifles rang out. Chorker threw up his arms, and tilting the chair backwards, fell with it into the grave.

"All return to the castle!" sang out Jim, and the movement of feet for a time was the only sound heard.

Chorker lay in a heap in his grave, still conscious, but certain that he was wounded to death. His eyes

were closed as if with wax. He heard the command given, listened to the retreating footsteps, and felt a hand pass over his breast. Then came the clanging of the gates as they closed, the sound of voices dying away across the courtyard, subsiding at last into a faint murmur from the hall.

He had been left to die, but he was not dead. Strange to say, also, he felt no pain. Presently he opened his eyes and found that he was lying upon his back with his heels in the air. They rested on the edge of the grave. The position was an uncomfortable one, and he shifted a little. As he did so, he saw there was a paper pinned to his breast.

He pulled it off, and read, in large printed characters, the following words:

"You have been shot with *blank cartridge* and died like what you are, a coward and traitor. You are not worth shooting. Go back to your friends."

His amazement was so great at first he could hardly realise what the writing portended. It seemed scarcely possible that it could after all have been nothing more than a joke.

But he got at it at last, and drew in a deep breath.

"Anyways," he muttered, "I live. Only I wish the young beggars had 'lowed me to stop in the castle. If I goes back to that Spanish lot they'll make short work of me. I must hang round a bit and see if I can't soften their hearts to let me in. I think I've had enough of going crooked. Gimme a chance, and I'll go straight in the future."

He clambered out of the hole that was to be no grave after all, and slowly made his way to the rear of the castle.

CHAPTER CLXVI.

THE MIDNIGHT SUMMONS AT THE GATE.



WHAT else could we do," said Jim; "it was impossible to shoot or hang him. We cannot turn ourselves into public executioners, and it was not nice to have him here. I don't suppose the old beggar will come to much harm. Now let us look round, as usual."

It was Chorker he was speaking of, and Morse was his companion. Together they proceeded round the castle, a duty they performed twice a day without fail.

It rather worried Jim that nothing had been seen of Eveline or those with her. Nor were there any

indications of the negroes being about. Nor had Charley, the bear, shown his interesting body. All had vanished as if they had been so much smoke.

The custom of the two friends was to take the back of the castle first, and there they got the best view from the back windows. In the bedroom of the three negroes they had rigged up a rough platform of empty boxes which could be easily scaled.

Springing lightly to the summit, Jim peeped out, but immediately bobbed his head down. He held up a warning finger.

"Morse," he said, "there is one of those fellows outside making a screen of bushes."

Morse stared at him with a look that was bordering on dismay.

"There is only one thing that could be wanted for," he said.

"What is that?" inquired Jim.

It was merely a formal question. He had already guessed the purport of the work.

"They have the second cannon there, or on the way," answered Morse.

"That is certain. And when they get it into position they can pound a hole in the wall in half an hour."

"We must try to stop it."

Morse knew the difficulties that beset the task. The builder of the castle had not contemplated an attack from the rear. No doubt he did his work before cannon came into use.

Walls too high, with windows impracticable for getting into if reached, he had thought sufficient. There were no ramparts, and the towers were all in the centre or in front. Shooting from these summits would not touch anyone immediately below.

"We must think this over," he said, "and for the present your looking out will suffice. When it grows dark I will take a survey of the position."

The discovery came upon them with a shock. They knew all along that getting a cannon there was possible, but did not dream it could be accomplished so soon. Besides, there had been a faint hope, off and on, that the enemy had gone away.

"Perhaps, after all," said Jim, squatting down on Romeo's disordered bed, "they may be making preparations that will only lead to nothing."

"We must never reckon on that," said Morse.

He could make some hand grenades, it was true, but the difficulty and danger of using them was apparent. The hand cannot throw projectiles very far, and an explosion near the walls of the castle might be as injurious to themselves as to the foe—perhaps more so.

Still, something must be done to thwart this, the latest movement against them. There was only one man in sight; but, of course, he was not alone. Others

were doubtless in the wood, preparing materials for cover. Probably they would succeed in erecting a barricade of sufficient strength to resist bullets.

"Have we any elastic bands anywhere?" suddenly asked Morse.

"I think there are a few," replied Jim, "but I hardly know where they are. Nap had them with an idea of putting up a gymnasium. You know the style of thing, with rings at the bottom of a band for a fellow to jump about and twist and turn on?"

"The very thing," said Morse; "look them up and make a few ordinary catapults. Not too much elastic, as we can get more force out of the shorter weapon."

"It strikes me we have not much time."

"No. If they get the cannon fixed they will pound a hole in the wall before morning. We cannot keep them out with a gun to play upon us. This is as ugly a thing as we have had to do with."

They lost no time in further debate. Jim went away to turn over the stores to find the elastic bands, and Morse proceeded to a spot in the upper part of the castle where he had stored away his chemicals.

They were in a disused chamber of which he had no key. But, as a precaution against their being interfered with, he had screwed up the door.

Jim got a few of his friends, Terry, Rainstone, Dawson, and two or three more to assist him in the search. It was almost dark when they came upon what they wanted.

The india-rubber bands were discovered at the bottom of a chest filled with cloth and calico for household use. Then they set to work making the handles out of pliable sticks that would permit of their being split and the necessary fork formed at the top. The length of india-rubber requisite was fastened on with strong twine and rubbed over with cobbler's wax.

On testing them with a small stone they shattered the missile to pieces against the wall of the hall.

By tea-time they had six completed.

Morse came in from the laboratory, which had been put in order, and a curtain hung up to replace the door. He examined the catapults and approved of them.

"I have been up, just at dusk," he said, "and the screen appears to have been completed. I saw nobody there."

"Is it very strong?" inquired Terry.

"No; merely brushwood, I take it. Simply something to hide the cannon from view."

Later on, when tea was over, there was a report from Felton from the ramparts, of something moving about not far down the broken path in front of the castle. He could see nothing, but he had heard men's voices.

Now the plans of the enemy were fully revealed. They designed to pound away at the rear of the

castle, which would probably induce the boys to retreat in front.

There an ambuscade was preparing to meet them. If they did not leave their shelter, the assault could be strengthened by the men in ambuscade. It was not far to go. In a quarter of an hour they could join their brethren in the rear.

A council of war led to a decision to at once begin harassing the enemy in front. Morse's rocket apparatus was still on the top of the great tower, and he handed to Jim several small packages.

"Tie them to a stick and shoot them down," he said; "they are harmless, and only intended to give light. Put a dozen of the best shots on the ramparts to pick off anyone they may see."

"And where will you be?" asked Jim.

"I," said Morse, "intend with Terry to work in the rear. I do not think they will get their gun into position to-night, or, if there, will be able to do much with it. But I shall do nothing until I am certain they are there. It would be childish to waste good material in burning a few furze-bushes."

Jim selected his assistants and sent them with rifles and ammunition to their posts. They were accompanied by Trueberry. Martin went with him to the top of the tower.

They could see nothing below but the outline of the woods. The sea was hidden in gloom. There was no sound.

"Doesn't seem as if anyone was down there," said Martin.

"No," assented Jim; "but it is all uncertainty."

He had brought some sticks with him, to which they bound the packets Morse gave him. The end to light had been pointed out to him. He laid the small rocket in the apparatus and set it alight.

A moment later it sped away with scarce a sound. When it reached the ground there was no explosion, but soon after a brilliant light flared up showing the woods and rocks and broken ground.

It lit up the castle, too, revealing the young riflemen on the ramparts. But no enemy was discovered, and there was nothing to fire at. The light died away.

"They are very closely hidden," said Jim, "or they are not there. We must wait awhile."

They waited a whole hour with the same result. A second rocket failed to show the presence of a living thing below.

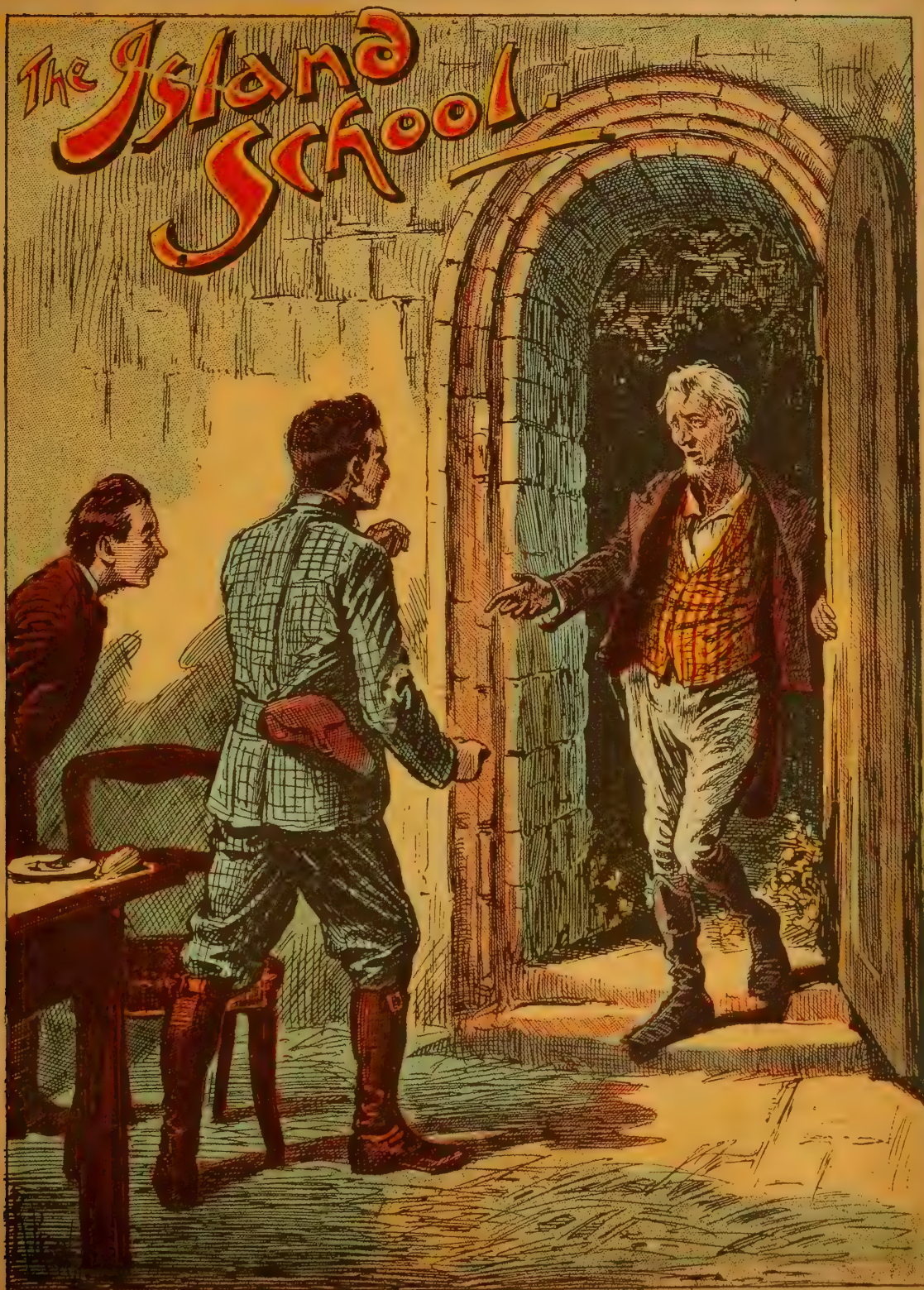
Then Jim made up his mind to pay a visit to Morse. He found him in the bedroom on the platform with Terry, below. They were in the dark, and Jim's entrance, although a quiet one, roused them both from their thoughts.

"Seen nothing yet, Morse?" whispered Jim.

"Nothing," was the reply, "nor you either, I know."

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



"Boys, I am starving. For days and days I have lived as the beasts of the field."

"How could you tell that?"

"Well, there hasn't been any firing."

"Of course you would have heard it. Now what are we to do?"

"Wait—wait," said Morse. "I have been examining these walls. They are quite thin compared to those in front."

"Why should that be?"

"Well, Jim, I suppose they thought they would be thick enough to serve every purpose. So they did at the time. But they are not thick enough to stand against shot from a cannon. I would undertake to pound a hole through them with 'Betsy' and 'Bella' under the hour, and the guns those fellows have will carry heavier metal by far."

"Shall I take some of the boys and attack them outside?"

"No, we must keep under cover, to my thinking. You see that we do not exactly know where we are; they may be in ambush. They will play cunning to the end."

So there was nothing to do but to wait, and it was very wearying. There was no rest for the harassed boys, and wearily they prepared to pass the night in the hall.

"Better have it right out with them," said Trimmer, bitterly, "than be cooped up much longer."

"Jim and Morse will pull us through it," said Felton, hopefully.

The time passed away until midnight, and no indication of assault was given by the foe. Morse remained at his post, chilled by the cold air and getting very tired, but holding out in his resolute way. Ganthony was sentry at the gate, Whiffer on the ramparts.

Suddenly both heard a sound of shuffling feet below. It was somebody moving along outside, approaching the gate. Whiffer leant over the rampart wall and dimly saw a figure below stealing across the bridge.

"Who goes there?" he cried. "Halt, or I fire!"

"Let me in," was the answer. "I have news for the captain. Not a moment to lose."

It was Chorker, and as he spoke he raised a stick he had in his hand and smote the gate with all his might.

Ganthony, on the platform by the portcullis, thrust his rifle through the open ironwork.

"Clear off," he cried, "or I will let fly at you!"

"I tell you," pleaded Chorker, "that I've news for the captain. If you don't let me in you will all be murdered before the morning."

He was evidently in earnest, but Ganthony was still doubtful about the course he ought to take. It was an understood thing that Chorker was cast off for good. But if he had news of importance it would be a mistake to send him away. Then, again, what if

he were playing the traitor, as he had done before?

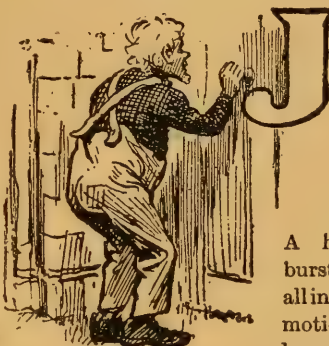
Behind him, or not far away, the enemy might be in force prepared to rush in the moment the gate was opened. On the whole he thought it advisable to report to Jim, who was in the hall. So he bade Chorker wait awhile.

"There ain't a minute to spare!" said Chorker, hoarsely. "I've heard and seen something that I want to tell on, and I'll tell it to nobody but the captain, young Jim Gordon. I want to make peace with him."

"I'll bring him along right away," said Ganthony.

CHAPTER CLXVII.

ANOTHER ATTACK.—THE BROKEN WALL.



JIM was about to come out to look round in his usual way as captain, when Ganthony came in with the news that Chorker was at the gate.

A howl of execration burst from the lips of all in the hall. Ganthony motioned for them to be quiet.

"He says he brings important news," he said to Jim, "and wants to make his peace with you."

"There may be something in it," returned Jim; "but we must be prepared for treachery. Half a score of you come along with your rifles. Ganthony, Rainstone, and myself will shift the platform and open the gate. If there is half a man behind Chorker, let fly at him. I will see to the reclosing of the gates."

When they got there Chorker was expostulating against the delay. He was in a fever-heat to get into the castle.

The platform was drawn back, and Jim cautiously opened the gate just wide enough for Chorker to slip through.

"Come along—smart!"

Chorker glided in and the gates were closed. So far all was well. Ganthony resumed his post, and Jim bade the midnight visitor come with him to the hall.

"If I find there is anything like humbug in this visit," said Jim, "you will be shot out again like a bolt from a catapult."

"I know I've been a sinner," said Chorker, "a reg'lar ole warmint; but I'm sorry. It don't lay no ways in the right direction. I made up my mind

to do you good if I could, and I've found out something as you ought to know."

"Get along with it."

"Them beggars is in the rear of the castle."

"We know that."

"Blessed if you don't find out everything. They are getting the cannon inter persition at this werry moment."

"That we have been expecting. It will be placed behind a screen of brushwood."

"Wrong for once," said Chorker, triumphantly.

"That was shoved up as a blind. I heerd 'em talking of it as I lay in a holler tree. The cannon is more to the east, hidden by a pile of stones, all save the muzzle. They guessed as you would be looking out of the winders, and they arranged according."

"This is news, Chorker," said Jim, "and I thank you for it."

"But it ain't all," continued the now elated Chorker.

"Twixt the spot where the cannon is—I reckon it is there by this time—they've been quietly screwing a hole in the wall. A boat came in from Minorca to-day, bringing in some blasting-powder, and they think they will be able to blow down all the back part of the castle."

Jim knew the full portent of this really terrible news, but his face was as calm as ever. Chorker went on with his story:

"I heerd it all. A chap named Vampos and that woman sat down nigh where I was hidden and talked freely. They said some words I did not understand, but they kept on tumbling into English, so that I got at the sense of it. Vampos said that when the walls had been shaken a bit by the cannon, the blasting-powder would bring the whole of that side down."

"Wait here, Chorker," said Jim. "I must see Morse about this."

"One word, Mister Gordon. You don't mean to turn me out again?"

"No; certainly not."

"Then I do my best to make amends for a sinful past. I've been a skunk, I admits it—a warmint, I don't deny it. Next time I goes on the wrong tack you shoot me real."

"I assuredly shall do so," said Jim, as he hurried away.

He found Morse and Terry both on the top of the pile of boxes with their heads near the window. They were darkly limned against the tree-tops and the sky.

"Come down!" said Jim, quickly. "You are in peril there."

"What is the matter?" asked Morse.

"Come down, I say. That screen is all humbug. The cannon is away to the right. They are preparing to blow down the walls."

"That accounts for the gritty, grinding sound we

have been listening to," said Morse, as he slid down. Terry, having no great yearning for being blown up, quickly followed him. Jim rapidly told them of the coming of Chorker and the tidings he brought with him.

"For once," he said, "the old rascal has acted on the square, and it is good enough for us to forgive him. Of course, if it would have served his purpose better to sell us again, he would have done so, but I vote we don't reckon that."

"I don't like this turn of things," said Morse, "but it all depends how the wall falls. It may even, after all, be a barrier to their getting into the castle. Anyway, if they are going to do it, *this* is not the place for us."

They returned to the hall, where they found Chorker dilating on the pleasure it was to him to be of help, especially as it gave him an opportunity to act against "them warmints"—meaning Lucia di Való and her band. Jim, Morse, and Terry sat down by the table, and the boys gathered up around and behind them. They were in possession of the news and its portent, and their anxious eyes rested on their leaders.

"In the time the castle was built," said Morse, "society was divided into two parts, above and below the salt. They all dined at one table, with a huge salt-cellar marking the line below which the better class would not sit, and above which the humbler parties dared not go. As at the table, so it was with the houses or castle. They were divided into two portions. Take this castle, for instance. The back part is only accessible by that kitchen door. Did you never notice it before?"

Strange to say, nobody, not even Jim, had observed it. But it was a fact. Right through the centre of the castle ran a thick wall cutting off the two upper portions of it effectually from each other. The kitchen-door, or rather the door leading to all the back offices, was the only means of communication, and that was on the ground-floor.

"By blowing down the back wall," said Morse, "these fellows will gain access to the inferior part of the castle. But with that way blocked"—he pointed to the kitchen-door—"they would not be able to come any further."

"Not until they made a hole in the middle wall," suggested Rainstone.

"Which they would do in time, or perhaps bring it down; but there are two towers resting partly upon it, and I do not think they have the means to carry out that work. A hole will do nothing. It will merely open up a way to what I may call the fighting part of the castle. With the ramparts and courtyard in our possession, it would take more men than they have to get at us. Now I have explained things, I am going to block the way."

He rose up and disappeared in the direction of his sleeping-room. But his visit was intended for the small store-room for his chemicals. He was absent a quarter of an hour, and then returned.

"I do not want a light," he said, "and I go alone."

As he spoke, a booming sound was heard from the rear of the castle.

"They've begun!" yelled Chorker.

"Silence!" cried Jim, sternly. "Cool and steady is our motto. What are you going to do, Morse?"

"Oh, block the way, as I said," was the even-toned reply. "No light, thank you, and no help. I am better without both."

Jim did not believe him. He was sure that Morse simply wished to spare him and others in case of accident. But he was never to be argued with, and he went off alone.

It was a time of dread anxiety. Jim stood by the open door listening. He heard Morse ascend to the upper room. Then came series of explosions, which he had learnt to recognise from their sound—so short, sharp, and decisive—as the work of Morse.

Cries of rage were heard from the enemy. But they were promptly followed by the booming of the big gun.

Jim fancied he heard a falling of masonry, but was not sure.

Again he heard the footstep of Morse in the passages below. It turned into the kitchen.

The reader will probably remember that there was a flight of steps in the kitchen leading to a gallery above, where windows gave light and a view of the scenery outside by day.

Morse, who had almost feline eyesight, stepped up to this gallery, and there laid down a small parcel with a fuse to it. This he lighted, and, with the flaring match in his hand, dashed down below.

Under the gallery he placed another package, also with a fuse attached. This he likewise ignited, and then dashed for the door.

He closed it, and sped along the passage to where Jim was standing.

"Get into the hall!" he said, hurriedly. "Close the door and lock it."

For once he seemed to be in a hurry. Jim promptly obeyed him.

"There is a breach in the wall," said Morse; "a small one, it is true. I daresay they are preparing their mine. I am sorry for the fellows at work upon it. Stop your ears."

Instinctively everybody did so, although they knew not why. But it was as well they did so, for almost immediately afterwards two explosions, so close upon each other that they might almost be considered one, broke the stillness with a deafening sound.

Then came the rush and rattle and booming of

falling masonry, almost as deafening as the roar of the explosions. Something thundered against the door which Jim had closed, but did not break through.

"Go to the sentries," said Morse, "and relieve them from all alarm. Jim, open that door, but do it cautiously."

Jim opened it as desired, and saw outside a mass of fallen stones and rubbish. Some big stones had fallen against the door, and a short distance from it the way was completely blocked.

"They will not come in that way in a hurry," said Morse. "I gave them a few trifles with the catapult, but I do not suppose I did much execution. All who were busy preparing to blow down the wall have been buried under it. I do not suppose there are more than half a dozen. But surely this last hint will suffice for them, and they will now go."

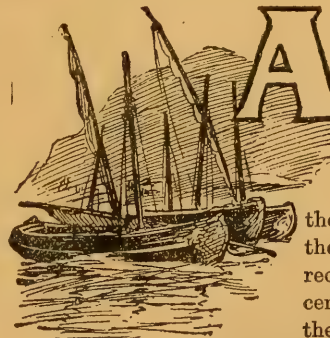
"I have said it before, and I say it again," said Jim, "Morse, you are a wonderful fellow."

Then, as if moved by one impulse, the boys burst into cheering, and, dashing out into the courtyard, renewed their demonstrations of joy so loudly that the enemy in the rear, dumbfounded and dismayed, heard them.

Nay, even to a lonely ship out at sea extended the sound, and the seamen of the watch, unable to tell exactly whence it came, talked of a coming storm, or it might be an eruption from stern Vesuvius, which often gave out warning rumblings far away from the seat of his violent action.

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

MOVEMENT BY THE LAGOON.



ALTHOUGH there was no part of the castle accessible to the boys that gave them a view of the position of the enemy, and they could only guess the full results of Morse's recent exploit, it was certain that for a time the siege was given up.

The morning came, and the cannon boomed no more. Not a sound was heard from the woods, and, in the direction of Silver Bay, the moored boats belonging to Lucia di Valo's men, anchored close inshore, rocked idly on the sea. They could be seen from the summit of the great tower.

It was in some respects a wintry day. The sky was

heavy with sullen clouds, and the wind blew cold. Earth and sky and water had put on a colourless aspect that was not cheering to the spirits.

So passed the morning, and there was nothing to do but to watch and sleep.

"We must turn night into day," said Jim.

It was arranged it should be so, for night was their recognised time of peril. He divided his forces into two parties, and they in turn divided the day into sleeping times.

One thing Morse had overlooked in his last exploit, and that was, the kitchen was a ruin, and, with the exception of such cooking-utensils as were in the stores, all they needed for domestic purposes was lost. Possibly everything was not destroyed, but it would take time and a given opportunity to dig them out.

But the main stores, being on the hall side of the castle, were there. So far, well; but again there was the question of fuel.

They had enough for the day, but the main body of it was likewise buried. Unless some could be procured from the outside, a day would see their little stock exhausted.

But it was no use bemoaning these facts. Nobody was to blame. What Morse had done was unavoidable, or, at the least, highly expedient. And in stopping a threatened assault upon the castle it had been very successful. Whatever betided them afterwards, they would have to grin and bear it.

In the afternoon—how the time in their anxiety crawled!—a report was sent down from the ramparts that a man was below getting a boat ready, one belonging to the school and lying with the others in the lagoon.

There was soon a swarm upon the ramparts, Jim, with his telescope, watching the man, who by that time was pulling across to the rocks.

His appearance showed that he was one of Lucia di Valo's men, but he was personally not known. He certainly was not Vamos. He went very steadily, occasionally casting anxious glances behind him, as if he feared an enemy ashore.

On touching land he quietly moored the boat, and upon his hands and knees stealthily crept up the rocks. Every movement expressed great caution. He avoided the higher points of the rocks, and keeping to the intersections between them and the hollows, gained the summit. There he lay down in an attitude that reminded Jim Gordon of pictures he had seen of chamois hunters upon the mountains.

What was the man doing there? Whatever it was it did not keep him long, for in a few minutes he was slipping backwards until he was well below the upper ridge. Then he travelled faster, reached his boat, and pulled back again.

"What is in the wind now? Is he hunting anything?" were questions asked among the boys.

But there was nothing to hunt. Jim knew that. The rock was rich with wildflowers, but barren of animal life. Besides, he had not waited to secure anything.

Then there came a fear into his heart. Was it possible that Eveline and those with her were there? If so, how was it they had lingered so long? Why had they not endeavoured to get taken on board a passing vessel, as originally designed?

He spoke of his fear, and there was immediately a conviction in the breasts of the listeners that he had solved the problem. But still proof was necessary, and how was it to be obtained?

"I'll go myself," said Jim; "it is a long way round by land, and there are difficulties in crossing—especially for women—the patches of water that lie between the rocks and the main island. You can take care of the castle while I am gone. If they are not there I shall be back about the middle of the night. Get me two or three biscuits, Terry."

"If you are caught abroad in the daylight," said Morse, "what will be the end?"

"You are a nice fellow to hint at peril," said Jim, with a good-humoured laugh. "Especially ready in taking advice, aren't you?"

Others endeavoured to dissuade Jim from going. At all events, they urged, he might wait awhile to see if any more men went over to the rocks. There were three hours between then and nightfall.

"Three precious hours to me," said Jim, "if I am to get there before the morning. I have said I am going, and I mean it."

As the next best thing to his staying in the castle with them, they urged his taking with him a rifle as well as his small-arms, and plenty of ammunition. To this he did not demur.

Terry fetched him the biscuits with a small bottle of wine. It was some that was left from the lot they brought from the vaults.

"Whatever it is," said Terry, "it is strong, and may help you after wading in cold water. The nights are precious cold."

Jim pocketed the wine, and the biscuits were placed in a leather bag, which he slung about his back. The gate was opened, and with a murmured "Good luck" from the throng of friends behind him, he started on his perilous journey.

Cautiously he proceeded along the front of the castle until he could see up towards the wood. There was no enemy in sight. He looked back towards the gate, where Morse was standing to see the last of him, and with a wave of the hand to reassure him all was so far well, he walked past the Redan and plunged into the wood.

"He is gone," thought Morse, "and I think it is right. Perhaps it would have been better if we all went there, too. Somebody is camping on the rocks, and those beggars have found it out. Perhaps it is only those niggers—that will be bad enough—but should it be Eveline, the lookout is very serious."

He returned to the ramparts and there kept watch until nightfall. Neither Jim nor any living being appeared in sight. Far away in the offing in a westerly direction he saw a small trading-boat seemingly bearing down upon the island.

That was nothing. The boat might, like many others he had seen at different times, be beating up against the wind, and be on the shoreward tack. It could not have any of the absent ones on board, or it would be sailing the other way.

Morse was very uneasy, and the feeling was general among those with him. They talked the matter over and the more they talked the less they liked it.

"Suppose it is Eveline and so on," said Trimmer, "what can Jim do to help them? It will be giving his life for nothing, and we can't spare him."

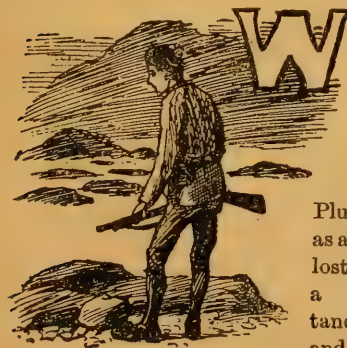
"But he is gone," said Dibble. "That we can't get over."

Morse went over to where the fire—the last they would be able to light in the castle without more fuel—was burning on the hearth, and sat down to think. So he remained for half an hour or more, undisturbed by the movement and chatter about him.

Then he looked up and said, "I know what we must do at any cost. Let us have an early supper, and then I will tell you what it is."

CHAPTER CLXIX.

JIM'S QUEST.—CROSSING THE WATER.—A CLOSE SHAVE.



WITH many doubts and fears in his usually calm breast, Jim Gordon went on his errand of discovery.

Plunging into the wood as already recorded, he lost no time in putting a considerable distance between himself and the castle, his

object being to avoid his enemies.

It was not personal fear of them that accelerated his movements, although he had the natural regard for his own safety. It was one of those he hoped yet feared to find on the rocks outside the lagoon that prompted the desire to avoid a collision.

The road he intended to take was practically that by which Chorker had travelled on a previous occasion. But, beyond the rent in the earth where that rather foolish old man had hidden his blackmailing property acquired from the schoolmasters, only to lose it again, Jim had no knowledge of the route, save that it entailed a crossing of water to get to his destination.

When Chorker crossed, the sea was very low, much lower than ordinary, owing to the wind and the tides. Jim could hardly expect to find matters so favourable now.

And, in addition, the season had changed from sultry autumn to a Mediterranean winter. The cold was not severe—it rarely is in that latitude—but the water would be chilly, and he must, if he swam across, remain in his wet clothes. Again, there was the ammunition he had brought with him; that must be kept dry. All these things he had to think of as he trudged along.

Down by the wood to the level below. Then on in a westerly direction, until he struck the undulating ground. After that, to the east again. By moving in this way, he made a detour clear of the scene of contest, and late in the afternoon he struck the rift we have referred to.

He would have journeyed in its depths as a further precaution, but was surprised and not a little dismayed to find it nearly full of water. From this it was evident that the sea was unusually high.

There was a poor prospect ahead of him, but he trudged on, determined to overcome all obstacles. Anon he arrived at the hilly ground, beyond which was the water dividing the main island from the rocks that formed a breakwater to the lagoon.

A glance sufficed to show him that he would have a task to get across. It was very different from the day when Chorker came over in quest of food. Then he had more land than water in view. Now the only land visible in the seething sea between was here and there a jutting head of stone, and it was at least a quarter of a mile across.

Jim did not pause to estimate the peril of the passage. He had very little daylight left, and if he meant to cross, he must start at once. If overtaken by darkness, he would have a poor chance of escaping from drowning.

The ammunition was packed in a broad, square parcel about six inches thick. This he bound with his sash tightly to his head. Under the sash, and on top of the parcel, he inserted his revolvers. What else he had about him did not matter much.

Holding his rifle over his head with one hand, he slipped quietly into the water and struck out for the opposite side. Ere he had made half a dozen strokes he became aware that the water was moving towards the sea.

There is little or no tide in the Mediterranean in the ordinary sense, but it varies in depth by the shore in places, according to the wind and the season of the year. The wind at that hour was blowing the water out of the shallows.

This state of things was of importance to Jim, in respect to the possibility of his being blown out to sea. Swimming with one hand only, he could not direct his course half so surely as he would have done with both arms available.

His clothes clung to him, and the cold water chilled him. But Jim was an experienced swimmer, and he knew that ere long the chilliness would wear off until fatigue overcame him. The problem was, how far could he swim, handicapped as he was with his clothes and accoutrements?

The strongest swimmer does not travel very fast in lumpy water; comparatively, he crawls along. With one arm only to assist his vigorous legs, Jim went very slowly indeed; but he kept on doggedly fighting his way. When about half across, or a little more, he came to a rock projecting from the water, and the temptation to rest took possession of him.

But he knew it would not do. Getting out of the water to rest meant a reactionary chill and a loss of time that was very valuable.

The darkness was already coming down, and he had a furlong yet to swim. Not much on land with a stout pair of legs, but something serious to one in his position.

But on he went, thinking of *anything* rather than the perils of his position, forcing his mind to take up more pleasant things, struggling, indeed, against a conviction that it would be as much as he could possibly do to reach the land.

Aching arms, a singing in his head, flames of fire dancing before his eyes—all this troubled him now, and, above all, the consciousness that he was making very slow headway indeed united to weigh his spirits down.

"But what's the use?" he muttered. "I can only give in when all is lost. I'll think I'm done for when I go under—not before."

Darkness now. He felt rather than saw it, for those flames of fire before his eyes had grown into a perfect conflagration—the outcome of overtaxed energies and the almost unbearable agony of utter fatigue.

It was only in a mechanical way he kept on and on, not knowing whether he was going to the right or to the left, or making any progress at all.

At length he felt that the sinews of his arms had performed all they were capable of doing. The machinery was worn out, and must come to a standstill.

He prepared himself for the sinking and the final

struggle for life under water, and then—his foot touched ground.

As if galvanised, he was endowed with new life. Ceasing the action of his arm, he allowed his legs to sink, and discovered that in the gloom he had unknowingly gained the shore and was in shallow water.

The arm with which he held the rifle was cold and stiff. He shifted the weapon to the other hand, and as he staggered forward he allowed the half-frozen arm to sink to his side.

Land at last, high and dry. With feelings that overpowered him for a moment, he sank upon the hard ground and lay quite still.

There was little life left in him. He was chilled to the very marrow of his bones, and he feared that, if he lay there long, he would die.

But a short rest was absolutely necessary, and he drew up his stiffened limbs as close as possible. It was the instinctive action of one who gets into a very cold bed in winter. The idea of it flashed upon him, and, despite his suffering, he laughed.

Laughter shakes us up and sets the blood healthily in motion. It did him good, especially as he laughed aloud.

A sense of returning warmth came over him, but only to be succeeded by another chill, for hard by he heard a soft footstep stealing down upon him. It was that of muffled feet, the step of the thief or the murderer; and he felt that it was his involuntary laughter that had drawn attention to his presence on the shore.

CHAPTER CLXX.

A MEETING OF OLD FRIENDS.—SURROUNDED.



JIM tried to rise and meet the presumed foe approaching him, but found he was scarcely able to do so. He got upon his knees, and drew his knife from its sheath, determined to defend his life to the last.

Then out of the darkness there loomed a huge figure, and a short, satisfied grunt fell upon his ear.

"Charley!" he exclaimed, scarce able to credit the evidence of his senses.

But Charley it was, and having thrust his nose against Jim's hand, and laid his ponderous head upon his shoulder for a moment, he proceeded to indulge

himself with a few of the capers he generally exhibited when overcome with joy.

"Come, old man," said Jim, "I want you to help me up."

As if he understood the expressed wish, Charley ceased to tumble and roll, and came up to Jim, who laid hold of his shaggy hide and pulled himself up to a standing position.

"That is better. Now help me along."

Jim hardly dared give rein to his hopes, but he felt sure that Charley was not there alone. Together they went on, and Jim, ere they had travelled far, began in accepted parlance to "feel his feet." He shifted the parcel of ammunition from his head, and carried it under his arm. His rifle was in the hand that rested on Charley's shoulder.

"Stop dere, whoeber you be!"

It was the voice of Romeo, but Jim could not see him, for it was now very dark.

"All right," replied Jim.

"Fo' de Lor' sake, am it Marse Gordon?"

Then from out of the sheltering shadow of the rocks there emerged several figures. Despite the darkness Jim knew them all—Macbeth, Hamlet, Changeling, and Sleery. He looked in vain for Eveline and her mother, and his heart grew faint with terror. If Changeling and Sleery had not been there he would not have thought so much about it, but what were they doing there without them?

"I am a bit done up," said Jim, when they began to ply him with questions. "There is a bottle of wine in my bag. I wish you would give me a little of it."

"Me do it," muttered Romeo, as he thrust his hand into the bag. "Sakes, Marse Gordon, you mighty wet!"

"I swam across the water at the top of the rocks yonder."

"Take a drop ob dis," said Romeo, holding the flask to Jim's lips. "Dat it. Good ole stuff! Me smell him."

Romeo had right through spoken in subdued tones, as if he feared being overheard. The wine did Jim good, and in a soft, yet clear voice he asked them if they had any shelter.

"Such as it is, Mister Gordon," replied Changeling. "It's close handy."

It was nothing more than a hollow between two rocks. Sleery explained that they roofed it in, the opening at the top, with broad pieces of shingle.

Poor as the place was, it was wonderfully warm, especially when Charley stretched himself down by the entrance.

"We calls him our blanket," said Changeling, "and was a-wondering where he had gone to when you and he, Mister Gordon, turned up together."

"Now tell me all that has happened to you," said

Jim, as he nibbled one of his biscuits. Being soaked nearly through with sea-water had not sensibly spoilt it. It was welcome to one in his condition. For the present he had, however, little real appetite.

Sleery told him of having put to sea with the ladies, and not meeting with a ship, they came ashore, as they thought, for the night; but as it was dark when they landed, they could not pick and choose their ground.

The consequence was that they ran upon a pointed rock, close inshore, and stove the boat in. "Knocked a hole in her as big as my head," said Sleery. "Without tools and timber it is impossible to repair her."

"And Mrs. Farrell?" inquired Jim, hesitatingly.

"The ladies got wet feet, but that was all," said Sleery. "We've made 'em a bit of a house out of the boat turned topsy-turvy, and propped on a kind o' shingle-wall. With the rugs they are pretty comfortable, and they haven't wanted food, as the darkies brought along a big supply. But we've been mighty anxious, hearing the sounds of firing and blowing up."

"We have had a terrible time," replied Jim, "and it is not yet over. But tell me by what lucky chance Romeo and his friends turned up here."

"You see it dis way, Marse Gordon," said Romeo. "Dat night when you tell us to cut and run, we made for de lower ground, where we stop a bit to wait for you. Den after a lot of banging away, we see de rascals come tearing down, and we boun' to clar out. So we went orf, and by-em-by come to nigh de spot which we spec you crossed to-night."

"Den we had a famlér councillor," said Macbeth, "and me gib dem two boys ob mine de advice to get ober, and lay close here until we see or hear from you."

"Barrin' dat you say nuffin' ob de sort," said Romeo, "you speak de trufe. It was me and Charley dat led off. Charley he came a-sniffin' round us when we left de castle, and he was wid us right trough, though showing a mighty power ob wishfulness to go back and gib some ob dem warmints more dan dey come for, Marse Gordon. It was Charley dat fust swum ober wif me on him back, and no sooner was he here dan he skedaddle off. But knowing dere a poor chance ob losing him, me go back for de ole folks, and twixt us we all get here, and den we fine dat Charley found out Miss Eveline and missus and Marse Dibble's 'fectionate aunst and siterer, which am Changeling and Sleery."

"I have a lot to tell you," said Jim, "but I fear to give the time to it now. Let me ask you a question. Are any of you conscious of your presence here being known to our enemies?"

"I see what you are driving at," said Changeling, excitedly. "There was a party on the rocks this artemoon, wasn't there?"

"Yes."

"I said so, but nobody would believe me."

"You might have verified it by climbing up to see," said Jim.

"That was what I did," said Changeling, "but not until it was too late. All were against it, in case I should be spotted—even Miss Eveline objected. But at last I went, and all I could see was a man far away on the beach going towards the chine."

"I was lighting a fire," said Sleery; "that blew the gaff upon us."

"That was rather rash," said Jim.

"Mrs. Farrell was almost stiff with the cold, and we thought that a few sticks—we cut up an oar for the fire—could be lighted early in the morning without being seen. The smoke they sent up wasn't worth mentioning."

"There is no doubt," said Jim, "that your hiding-place here is known. Whether it will be considered worth while to come for you I cannot tell. I come to warn you, and to assist you in taking precautions to save your life and the lives of those with you."

"Look at Charley!" exclaimed Romeo.

They were sitting in the dark, but Charley, at the mouth of their shelter, was darkly outlined against the sky. The intelligent beast was sitting up, with his ears pricked, in the attitude of a listener.

One and all held their breath. A short silence followed, to be broken at last by the sound of someone stumbling among the rocks at a distance.

"Somebody dere!" exclaimed Romeo.

"Be quiet all," said Jim.

He took the command of the party naturally. "How far is the boat from here?"

"Not ten feet," replied Sleery. "The ladies are asleep. They were very wakeful and anxious last night. It was feared that the castle was blown down. Miss Dibble said she knew that Morse would do it sooner or later."

"We need not wake them for the present," said Jim. "Needless alarm won't help us or save them. Charley!"

The bear was about to move away. The voice of Jim checked him.

"Here, good boy," said Jim, "we may want you to do something better than tackling a single man. Come out quietly."

Jim seemed to have forgotten his recent fatigue; for he was one of the first out of the shelter, and, stealing away a short distance, he stood still to listen. Undoubtedly there were sounds of movement, of suppressed voices, and slipping feet in different directions. But they were as yet some considerable distance away. In the clear air sounds travelled freely, and the echoing propensities of the rocks assisted the hearing. Presently he rejoined his companions.

"There is little doubt," he said, "that we are practically surrounded. But they cannot tell exactly where we are. I think it is their intention to take up a certain position, and then wait until the dawn to make out where we are."

"What leads you to think so?" asked Sleery. "I don't doubt your being right, Mister Gordon, but I should like to know."

"If they knew where we were," replied Jim, "they would come along in a body. Instead of which, they have divided themselves into parties and posted themselves about so as to cut off our retreat. It is hardly likely they will attempt to close in on such a night as this."

"Bet on Mister Gordon," said Changeling, "and you will win your money."

"The truth of the theory can be tested," said Jim. "If we hear no more movement for a time we may feel assured they are posted for the night. They cannot move over such ground as this without making some sort of noise."

They all listened for a while, but no more sounds were heard. It was only reasonable, therefore, to assume that the enemy would wait for daylight.

"We have at least several hours before us," said Jim; "there is no occasion to hurry. But we must try to find some way out of this."

CHAPTER CLXXI.

AN ANXIOUS NIGHT.



VERY rarely had Jim felt himself in such a hopeless maze of thought. Ponder as he might, he could see no way out of the terrible position they were in. He did not actually know the strength of the invading foe, but he reckoned that Lucia di Valo, who assuredly had learnt of Eveline's being there, would bring all her force so that there could be no possibility of failure.

And what would be the fate of Eveline in the hands of that revengeful woman, endowed, as she had too plainly shown, with the ferocity of a tigress?

It gave Jim the heartache to think of it. Better had the girl been dead. He could almost have shot her himself rather than she should have met with such a fate. But he could not go to that extent. Surely

there must be some road out of this jungle of peril?

But by what road? Not by the sea, for they had no boat. Not by the way he had come, for it would be impossible to get helpless women across the water.

Then there came a ray of hope. Might they not steal over the rocks between the enemy and get to the boats below in the lagoon? They might even shut the foe up on the rocky land—for a time, anyway—by taking away all the boats.

There was one chance, and he roused himself from thought to give it utterance. But the answer that came from Sleery showed that it could not be done without sacrificing Mrs. Farrell.

"She's dead lame!" said he.

"Eveline," said Jim, "must be saved. Romeo, you could guide her to the boats, and the rest of us could remain to fight it out."

"Miss Eveline neber leab her moder," said Romeo.

"Of course not. I might have thought of that. One thing yet remains to be done. Romeo, you must away to the castle and let them know there the fix we are in. I do not ask them to risk their lives to come to the rescue. State the case, and tell them they are to do as they please. You have four hours to get there and back. If," added Jim, "they will not come, do not throw away your life by returning here. It will be a needless sacrifice."

"Dat 'bout what me shall do," muttered Romeo. "Good-bye all, frens, if me nebber see you again."

He slipped out and vanished in the gloom, as he scaled the rocks with naked feet and without a sound.

"'Bout de bess son dat eber bress a fader," said Hamlet, scooping a tear out of his eye.

"De comfyer ob my ole age," sobbed Macbeth.

And, despite the troublous nature of their position, the listeners smiled. They were amused to learn how circumstances changed their views of the gentle Romeo.

In times of peace Romeo was all that a son should not be, but when there was war and terror in the air, who so perfect as he?

They might never see him more. Therefore did they, after the manner of mankind, mourn the dear departed. And they were a little maudlin on their own account, for in whispers they began to bemoan their lot, and to repent of their lives in general. Macbeth, being the elder, was the more fervent in his utterances of repentance.

But a request from Jim for silence closed their tale of woe and sorrow, and in grim stillness another hour passed away.

"Romeo has not been stopped," said Jim, speaking in a low and guarded tone.

It was perhaps more of a hopeful expression than a positive assertion. Nevertheless, the stillness was encouraging. Romeo would not have yielded himself up to an enemy without some show of resistance. He certainly would have made his voice heard, unless he had been attacked from behind and suddenly struck down.

"Let those who can, get a little sleep," said Jim. "We may want all our strength for the morrow."

"I am that 'ere wakeful," murmured Changeling, "that I couldn't sleep for a week. Mister Gordon, you had better lie down."

Jim understood him. It was Changeling's way of taking the first watch upon himself.

"For an hour, then," he said; "but do not make a mistake. I must be aroused after a short sleep. All our lives may depend upon it."

They all knew that. Not one there possessed the ready wit to act if an emergency arose. Changeling faithfully promised to arouse him, as near as he could guess, in an hour's time.

All but Changeling huddled under the shelter, and sleep came to them as a boon. Jim went right away into unconsciousness, and for an hour and a half never stirred.

Changeling was about to arouse him, when he awoke suddenly. His faculties cleared as breath flies from a mirror at high noon, and he emerged from the shelter, giving himself a shake to dispel the sense of chilliness.

"You have let me lie too long," he said.

"I do not think it is more than an hour," answered Changeling. "Look at the stars."

Jim looked aloft, and saw by the position of the Great Bear that it was early times yet.

"Go and lie down, Changeling," he said. "I will awaken you when I want you."

A slight sound away to the left caused him to turn sharply.

"What was that?" he asked.

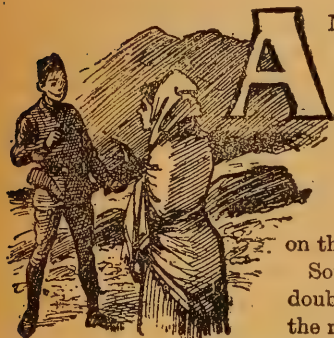
"A bit of shingle shifted," Changeling answered. "You can hear it, off and on, all night, just as you hear stairs in a house creaking. In my opinion, something is always moving."

Jim stood still listening, but the sound was not repeated. Whatever had caused it, it was very slight.

Charley had come out with Jim, but he bade the bear return with Changeling. The bear was the "warming-pan" of the sleepers.

So Charley went back, and Jim was left alone.

CHAPTER CLXXII.

THE NIGHT-WATCH, AND THE FIRST SHOT AT THE
DAWN OF DAY.

A MINUTE or so after Changeling had gone in to rest, the slight shifting sound near Jim was repeated. He whipped out his revolver, and stood on the alert.

Something was undoubtedly moving near the rocks. He could see the dim outline of it, apparently human, but curiously top-heavy.

It would have been folly to create a disturbance without just cause, as so much depended on their being able to lie quiet until the morning. Jim therefore did not shoot as he was tempted to do, but boldly advanced to see what it was.

"Don't fire that dreadful revolver," said the familiar voice of Eveline, softly.

It was she, indeed, with a rug wound about her head and shoulders which gave her that strange top-heavy appearance which for the time puzzled Jim. He uttered an exclamation of reproach and pleasure mingled.

"Why do you come out here in the cold?" he asked, as they met and their hands closed together.

"I cannot sleep to-night," replied Eveline, "for I feel as if something dreadful was about to happen."

"That must have been your natural apprehension all along."

"We have been in fear. But the feeling now is different, as if the end were near. I cannot exactly explain my meaning."

"I understand," said Jim, "so you have been awake?"

"Yes, and I heard you arrive, but I thought I would not trouble you. Why did you come?" asked Eveline, sadly. "It is only the sacrifice of another life, and one that might have been valuable by-and-by. We poor creatures are nothing."

"That may be your opinion, Evy, but it is not mine. I am here because I felt it my duty to come."

"How did you know we were here? Both mamma and myself insisted on no signals being made to

attract your attention, for we knew you would be coming at the risk of your life, and, perhaps, the others also. What an awful time you have had at the castle!"

"Not so bad as our enemies, though," said Jim, with quiet elation. "I should say that fifty of them have met with death. It is a horrible thing, I know, but we *had* to do it. Poor Waller is gone. He was shot in the head, and some of us have a scar or two, but on the whole we have done wonderfully well. Morse is a marvel. Without him we should all now be still enough."

"And what would Morse have done without you?" said Eveline. "May I walk with you? I cannot sleep. Shall I bother you with my chattering?"

"Not if you speak softly. We are surrounded, and all depends on our being able to get help in the morning. It ought to come early, but if we fence ourselves in we may be able to hold out for hours."

"Mamma is very ill," said Eveline; "she is worn out with anxiety. You have seen nothing of papa, I suppose?"

"Not heard anything of them since they were taken prisoners."

"Them! Oh, yes. He had Storeby and Turner with him. I suppose those wretches have murdered them all?"

"It is possible. How is Miss Dibble?"

"Alternately ferocious and tearful. She says she has something on her mind, but won't tell us what it is. And she longs to get hold of a Spaniard, Don Alguia Marbalo for choice, so as to have him in a quiet corner all to herself. I think a well-plucked fowl would have as many feathers as the hairs she would leave on the Don's head."

Eveline laughed softly. Even at that time of anxiety she could see the humorous side of the gaunt Miss Elegantine.

"You are plucky," said Jim, admiringly. "Well, Evy, we must hope for the best. I shall fight to the last, you may reckon. So will most of those with me. Macbeth is the only one who may collapse at the start, although I don't reckon much on Hamlet."

"I will fight, too," said Eveline. "Now, Jim, don't laugh. I mean it. But, of course, I shall make a poor show."

"It is no laughing matter," said Jim.

So they walked to and fro for two hours or more, while the earth turned upon its centre. When Jim reckoned it was about one in the morning, he insisted upon Eveline's retiring.

"I am going to waken those fellows," he said; "we must have some sort of shelter."

"Can't we help you? Do let me do something."

"It is not woman's work," said Jim.

So he dismissed her, and then quickly awoke the

sleepers. While walking up and down with Eveline, he had conceived a plan of defence that might serve them at least for a few hours. It was very simple, and, on that account, the more likely to answer its purpose. He briefly explained what it was.

"We must make a semicircular breastwork enclosing sufficient space for us all," he said. "Our backs must be to the sea, and we must be close to it, so that they cannot take us in the rear. That must be our last stand if no help comes."

"It is a good idea," said Sleery.

"You cannot be too quiet getting it together. It ought to be done in two hours. We have not far to carry the slabs, and there are plenty of them lying close handy. If you will bring them to me I will put them in place. But do not forget that a slip may be fatal to us. If those vagabonds were certain of our locality, they would be down upon us at once."

They moved silently, and Jim, as builder, worked so quietly that only the faintest gritty sound, as two stones or rocky pieces slightly shifted, told of the labour that was proceeding.

The first semicircle was completed, more than breast-high, but not too high for shooting over, and then Jim thought of an inner and smaller one which would afford protection to the three women folks.

So quickly had the first defence been completed that there was ample time to carry out the second, and when all was ready Macbeth was deputed to arouse the sleeping women and bring them over to their place of refuge. In half an hour the dawn would be there. He was especially enjoined to impress upon them the necessity of being as silent as possible.

After a short delay the three women came over like shadows. Eveline had prepared her mother and Miss Elegantine for seeing Jim, and taught them the desirability of reserving their talk for a more fitting opportunity, which it was possible—nay, probable—would never arrive.

Mrs. Farrell took Jim's hand and pressed it. So did Miss Elegantine, who would have added a kiss upon his brow if he had not dexterously avoided the chaste salute by shamming the necessity of tying a bootlace. He stooped so suddenly that Miss Elegantine's kiss was wasted on the empty air.

"Now," whispered Jim, straightening himself up again and backing out of reach of Miss Elegantine, "let us have such breakfast as we can get. The ladies will please take a seat inside and keep their faces to the sea. Sit close against the wall and do not show yourselves, on any account, until we desire it."

"And what is to become of me as a fighter?" asked Eveline, reproachfully.

"You will be kept as a reserve," said Jim.

Charley was also appointed to the inner circle. His bulky body would be in the way within the outer line of defence.

Macbeth was told off to sit down and load a weapon, or hand ammunition as required. The rest were armed to do the shooting.

"Spec now dat Romeo got clar 'way," muttered Macbeth, "and what care he for him poor ole grandfather? Blarm de day me fool 'nuff to come on dis island!"

But, with all his wailing, the old nigger had become dogged and resolute. He, too, would, at a pinch, try conclusions with the enemy. In his sash he had a long carving-knife, which he was sure would be useful.

Hamlet was resolute, too, if he did feel a bit shaky about the knees. He had a rifle and a revolver, and at close quarters, might be relied upon to hit a fair-sized man in three or four shots.

They hurried on with their breakfast; the men eating mechanically but with fair appetite, the women partaking of very little.

Then, with loaded arms, the men sat down and waited for the dawn. The position they took up was at the end of the gangway, formed by the two semicircles of stones, where they had a view of the sea. Above the horizon, to the left, the light would appear anon.

The darkest hour is that before the dawn. Why it is so we do not pretend to say, but so it is upon earth, and there is everywhere a hush of expectancy that, in lonely districts, is strangely impressive.

Even the sea was so lazily moving that scarce a sound followed its falling and rising on the shore.

The dawn came at last, a faint, bluish flush in the sky heralding it.

Stevenson called it the "mother of the dawn," and his admirers think it one of the most poetical utterances ever known, but long before Stevenson, or before this country was a nation, the Persians gave a name to the early blue flush in the sky. They called it "the mother of the young god," the juvenile deity being, of course, the sun. In our opinion this is the more poetical expression of the two, and certainly more original.

There it was before the eyes of the watchers for a moment, only to disappear. Then came a steadier breaking up of the gloom of the horizon in the form of a yellowish flush.

"The dawn is here," whispered Jim. "To your posts."

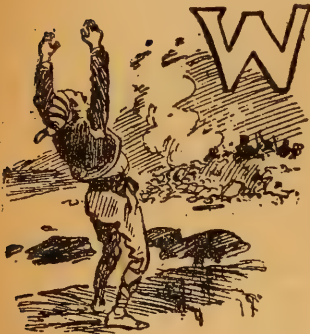
They crept there upon their hands and knees, and,

the rifles being loaded, they had nothing to do but to await the coming of the enemy. Jim kept watch with his face just above the crest of the stone wall of defence.

For a spell he saw nothing but the rocks and a brightening sky. But he had not long to wait. On the summit of the lagoon breakwater to the left rose up the figure of a man in Spanish dress. Jim steadily covered him with the rifle and pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER CLXXIII.

THE ATTACK AND THE DEFENCE.



WITHOUT a cry the man threw up his arms and fell in a heap. His fall was followed by a silence that seemed to be of many minutes' duration. But it was only a matter of moments.

Then arose a hoarse shouting

from the other side of the rocks, and several heads, cautiously raised, came into view. The defenders were all upon their feet now, but Jim restrained their fire.

"There is not enough of the men to shoot at," he said; "wait awhile."

The men espied their fallen comrade, and from him turned their gaze towards the beach. Seeing the preparations made for defence, they shouted again, and lying close, opened fire.

But they could do no harm, for the rocks were not of sufficient elevation to enable them to fire direct into the enclosure. The bullets struck the stones of the outer and inner defence, against which they were flattened and fell harmlessly.

Still they were embarrassing to the extent that it was dangerous to look over and return the fire. But to remain silent might give them encouragement, and Jim set an example by springing up, taking rapid aim at the first man he saw partly exposed, and discharging his weapon. The man howled out a curse, and grasped his leg convulsively.

"Hit, anyway," muttered Jim.

Sleery and Changeling also fired, but only one of them hit a man. They were not certain who was the fortunate one. Hamlet then fired straight into the air, and was promptly told to lay down his weapon.

"It is wasting good powder and shot," said Jim.

"Get ready for them when they come to close quarters."

But this the enemy did not mean to do at once. Having expended some useless powder and lead, they ceased firing and vanished. But it would have been madness to suppose they had gone for good. There were forty of them at least, the entire force left in Lucia's command, and they could see that they had a very small body to contend with.

What they did do was to leave about a dozen sharpshooters on the rocks to fire at anyone who exposed himself, while the rest divided into two parties, and making a detour, came creeping along the beach. One party was commanded by Vamos, the other by Lucia in person.

Anticipating some such movement, Jim was on the watch. He backed to the opening between the semi-circles of stones where he had sat watching for the dawn, and lying down, peered round just as Lucia appeared about two hundred yards up the beach.

She was walking erect, and coming round the rocks were her men, who were in a stooping attitude, holding their guns horizontally.

Jim could have shot her, but he had not the heart to do it. She was a woman, and he could not have wantonly killed the most miserable of the sex, much less one who, with all her faults, was as brave as she was beautiful.

Lying where he was, Jim was not perceived, so he had a fair chance of shooting, and taking aim at one of the men almost immediately behind Lucia, he fired. He saw the man fall and roll over and over, clutching the sands in a frenzied manner in his terror and agony. But Lucia was not dismayed. She called upon her men to follow, and there was an answering shout from the opposite quarter.

"Heaven help us now!" cried Jim.

Without help he feared that the last struggle had come and would go against him. He dashed back to his men, and called upon them to be prepared.

"And load, you two niggers, for your lives!" he said.

They had one spare rifle, which was kept circulating round during the next three minutes. Jim, Sleery, and Changeling fired alternately at the two approaching bodies of the foe.

They came along more slowly than might have been expected, for the men were constantly taking advantage of every little hollow among the rocks to hide themselves, from which retreats they had to be drawn by hard words from Lucia and blows from Vamos. Several of their number fell, but still they came on.

"Hasten!" Lucia cried, in a voice that was heard far away. "One dash at them and the day is ours! Fools, there are but three of them!"

There was a moment's pause, and then the whole

party broke cover and came tearing down upon the little breastwork.

"All over, I fear," thought Jim.

But as the maddening thought passed through his mind the sharp report of rifles was heard from the summit of the rocks, and a ringing cheer followed.

A glance upwards showed to the delighted Jim a swarm of his castle friends, with Romeo in their midst. He made out Morse acting as leader.

The first volley laid some of the enemy low, and the air resounded with the cries of the wounded. To remain in the open with so many guns bearing upon them was impossible, and the rest retreated close to the rocks. But the hiding there was very poor. They were still under the fire of the exultant defenders of the breastwork.

Lucia, with the remnant of her men, dashed past and joined Vamos. With him she held a hurried conversation, and in a body they retreated towards the mouth of the lagoon. It was not in sight at that spot, being round a turn in the beach.

Jim guessed the purport of the movement. He saw all that had transpired since Romeo left, as in a single picture, so vivid was his mental vision under the influence of excitement.

Romeo had got away with the boats, reached the castle, and brought back the party of rescue. They crossed the lagoon in the boats which were now moored on the opposite side of the rocks.

Lucia di Valo had also taken in everything with a thought, and the purport of the movement was to get round, seize the boats, and practically imprison the whole of the boys upon the strip of beach.

By posting half a dozen men on the other side of the water crossed by Jim, the way of retreat would be barred. The remainder of the enemy could then go on to the castle, take it easily with its handful of defenders, destroy them, and return.

Before they were out of sight, Jim understood it all, and hastily calling upon Sleery and Changeling to remain with the women, he leapt over the stone wall and ran to meet his friends.

They saw him coming, and a shout went up that rent the air like a clap of thunder. He motioned to them to remain where they were, and, leaping with frenzied haste, was soon beside Morse.

"The boats!" he said; "look to them."

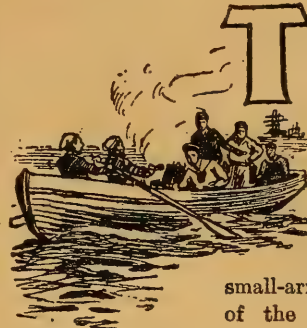
"They are all right—drawn up on the shore," replied Morse.

"The foe are after them!" shouted Jim; "we must cut them off. Keep along the ridge so as to intercept them in case they should double back."

It was a rugged way that necessitated much climbing up and jumping down, but the boys were as active as mountain goats, and in five minutes they sighted Lucia di Valo and her followers again.

CHAPTER CLXXIV.

HELP FROM A MOST UNEXPECTED QUARTER.



THE remnant of the enemy was closely huddled together and looking about in a bewildered manner. The cause of this sudden stoppage was not at the time apparent, but the rattle of small-arms from the direction of the lagoon gave an unlooked-for clue to it.

"Who on earth can it be?" exclaimed Morse.

"Let us get along and see," was Jim's reply.

They bounded on, with the rest at their heels, and in a moment or two came in sight of those who had unexpectedly come to their further aid.

To the astonishment of all, the new-comers were mostly of the same type, as to dress, as their enemies, but there were two or three in the good old British nautical attire. They were in a big lateen boat, close inshore, and two of their number were propelling it to the land with their oars. The rest, about half a score, were standing up, loading and firing with all the rapidity they could command.

Jim's naturally quick eye saw the position, and how he could take advantage of it.

"Down, boys, to the beach!" he cried; "don't let them retreat this way. Remember those we have had to leave behind us."

The boys poured down, and quickly ranged themselves in a line just as Lucia's followers turned tail. Lucia herself lay upon the sands apparently dead.

"Give them a volley!" said Jim.

The terrified men in retreat were half blind. They saw nobody in front of them, and the first intimation they had of danger in the rear was conveyed to them by powder and shot. So effective was the fire that only three remained upon their feet, and they cast down their arms, howling for mercy.

"The fight is over!" shouted Jim; "the day is ours. Here come our friends."

He recognised the foremost. It was Giuseppo, the smuggler, whose life had been spared, as recorded in an earlier stage of our story. The bread of mercy cast upon the waters had returned to the boys after many days.

"Senor," he cried, "let me take charge of those men."

"Do what you will with them," replied Jim, "and thank you for your timely coming."

He held out his hand, and Giuseppe grasped it eagerly, raising it to his lips.

"Senor," he said, "in grateful memory of the past I come."

He motioned to his men to take possession of the prisoners, which they did in the most unceremonious manner, and in a minute they were bound by the arms.

Jim before this had turned his attention to those who appeared to be his own country people. Two of them were middle-aged sailors, and the third wore the *négligé* uniform of a young officer in the merchant service. He was not more than seventeen at the outside, and slim for his age.

"To what good chance do we owe your presence here?" asked Jim.

"To a bad chance, one way," was the reply, with a smile. "With two of our men, all that are left of a ship sunk in the Bay of Biscay, I was at Gibraltar, when our friend here turned up at a *café* where I was staying. He had a story to tell of a number of youngsters cooped up in a castle by a lot of blackguards, and wanted recruits to go with him to the rescue. He also had an insuperable objection to applying to the authorities for aid. So I and my men volunteered. It was something to do."

"And very heartily I thank you," said Jim.

"I ought to say, perhaps," continued the young stranger, "that Giuseppe was diffident about the authorities owing to his being slightly connected with the contraband business."

Giuseppe smiled, showing his white, strong teeth.

"They call me a liar," he said; "no help from them. No. Much too stand off they are there."

The young stranger introduced himself further as Johnny Daw, and the men as Cobbles and Smith. They all seemed to be delighted with the issue of the adventure, and not too much concerned about the fallen.

But there were wounded to be attended to, and Morse had already gone on to where Lucia was lying. She was not dead, but sorely wounded, and she had recovered the consciousness which she had temporarily lost. Her eyes were fixed on Morse, upon whose arm her head rested.

"Where is the other one?" she asked.

"There are many of us," replied Morse, evasively.

He guessed whom she was referring to, but he did not care for Jim to be in any way associated with this strange, fiery woman.

Jim, however, at this moment came up, and kneeling down, expressed a hope that Lucia was not seriously hurt.

"I know not and care less," she replied; "all I lived and fought for is lost. Everything—even the saints are against me and fight for you. Are you not

glad? Do you not rejoice to see me lying so helpless here?"

"No," answered Jim, "I am not such a brute as that. You have done your best to destroy us, but that does not count now."

"And the girl—she with the fair hair and child's face—she lives?"

"I left her half an hour ago. She was well then."

"Ah—h—h!"

No words can describe how much there was expressed in the deep-drawn exclamation. It conveyed so much that was despairing, such a sense of utter defeat, of loss irreparable, that Jim was deeply moved. He had learnt not to judge all people of the earth by the British standard. Lucia must be judged, and perhaps condemned, from the standpoint of her nationality, and even by local surroundings from her birth.

As she had been taught, and could but view them in her passionate way, so she was guided in her actions. She did not ask for Vámos or any of her followers. After that "Ah—h—h" she closed her eyes.

Her wound was somewhere in her side, and the blood was slowly flowing from it. Neither Morse nor Jim could help her, but relief was at hand in the persons of Eveline and her mother, whom Terry had hastened to find and met on the way.

"Poor dear!" was the first utterance of Mrs Farrell.

In the contemplation of a wounded woman, she woman-like, forgot all else. Eveline said nothing, but kneeling down, took Lucia's head upon her lap.

"You may leave her to us," Mrs. Farrell said to the boys.

They were glad to do so, and hastened to help in other matters. With the wounded Giuseppe was already busy, and being an old hand at rough surgery, did all that was possible to relieve them.

But while doing it he did not forget to rate them soundly for their work upon the island.

"Better for you not to return to Minorca with life," he said, "for the Governor shall know the truth."

"It was all Lucia di Valo," they pleaded.

"Bah!" said Giuseppe, contemptuously, "led by a woman! I feel shamed for you. When you get well, go and hide yourselves on some lone island."

More of the men had been killed than simply wounded. For them there was to be burial, and Giuseppe said he would see to that too.

By-and-by, as he and Jim moved among the dead lying scattered here and there, they came upon Vámos. His earthly career had been cut short by a bullet lodged in his heart.

"He came here to win a love that never could have

been his," said Giuseppe, "and he has lost everything. He was a brave fellow, as the stay-at-home Minorcan men go."

The scene on the beach was one of subdued animation. In the presence of so many of the dead, any loud demonstration of rejoicing would have been unseemly.

Something bordering on the farcical, however, eventually transpired through Miss Elegantine. From some hole among the rocks she succeeded in unearthing an unhappy Minorcan who must early have taken refuge there, seeing that the rifle he carried had not been fired that morning.

Miss Elegantine hauled him out, and holding him by the collar with one hand, belaboured him with the other, so that his cries brought quite a little assemblage to the spot.

For a time they let her have her own way with the captive, but as he became dazed, and his cries for mercy sank down to moans, Changeling interfered.

"There, missus," he said, "I think you have done your bit. Let him go. All wimen will be p'ison to him henceforth and for ever."

"I feel better now," said Miss Elegantine, as she gave the man a final open-handed blow, "but if I had not got hold of one of 'em, I should never have slept—not even in my grave."

The question of returning to the castle was now to be settled. Mrs. Farrell and Eveline were bent upon taking Lucia di Valo with them, and they asked for a boat to be brought round to the mouth of the lagoon. The wound of the handsome Spaniard, they said, was very serious, and the utmost care must be exercised in the transport.

Under Mrs. Farrell's directions, the boat, on its arrival, was prepared with the rugs they had with them, so as to make a temporary couch, and, with the greatest care, the boat was taken to the old landing-spot opposite the ruins of the old school.

Before them nearly all the boys, and the three Britishers who had arrived with Giuseppe, were on the way thither. Giuseppe remained behind to dispose of the dead, but hoped to join them at the castle in the evening.

Jim Gordon, Morse, Terry, Trimmer, and Dawson remained with Sleery and Changeling to assist Mrs. Farrell and Eveline in carrying Lucia di Valo. Miss Elegantine and Charley also lingered as spectators.

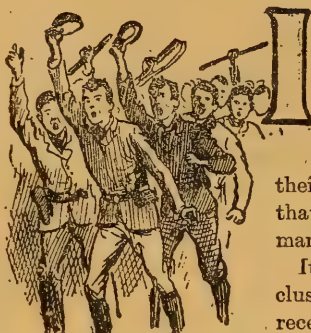
Martin and Trueberry were among those left in the castle. Morse had insisted upon it, notwithstanding the former pressingly desiring to join the party of rescue.

It was slow work bearing the wounded woman up the rugged way. But if the journey pained her she made no sign. Her eyes were open, and for the most part fixed on the slender form of Eveline, as if wonder-

ing how so frail a creature could have unconsciously originated such a terrible tragedy as had been enacted on the island.

CHAPTER CLXXV.

AFTER THE BATTLE WAS OVER.



IN the great hall there was a scene of excitement that beggars all description. The fight was over and victory theirs, with so little loss that it bordered on the marvellous.

It was a foregone conclusion that Jim would receive an ovation. He tried to restrain his admirers, but it was not to be done. They certainly kept fairly quiet until Lucia di Valo had been carried up to Mrs. Farrell's room. Then they burst forth with a series of ringing cheers that would have split the roof of a frail building. But the castle was built to endure, and we cannot say that it even rocked under the riot of voices.

Lamentations, however, were heard. They came from Hamlet and Macbeth, who were bewailing the loss of their kitchen. Romeo suggested that for the present they should cook in the open air, and use the courtyard for the purpose. Romeo was the gifted member of the family, especially in times of emergency.

Martin, who had remained with Trueberry, and a few of the boys and Chorker, to guard the castle, set out with some assistance to cut wood for the fires. Every scrap of available fuel had been burnt.

The place was like a hive of bees, everybody doing something, or appearing to do so. There were, however, three or four—among them Dibble—who were so bewildered in their joy, that they ran in and out of the castle like the proverbial dog in the fair.

The war with the enemy was over. No more fighting and worrying. No more being cooped up in the narrow confines of the sombre building—nothing but freedom and peace. Unless—well, there was a possibility of further trouble with the sapient Governor of Minorca, or the no less wonderful Don Alguia Marballo.

It was in the mind of Jim and one or two others, and when Giuseppe, having done his work below earlier than expected, came up to the castle, the possibility was mentioned by Morse.

"Old Spartola will do nothing," said Giuseppe, with a contemptuous laugh, "and as to the relatives of the dead men, I think they will not bother about them. Lucia di Valo mostly recruited from the idlers—ne'er-do-wells, I think you call them—and, for the greater part, their absence will be borne without a tear. There is one exception—Vamos; he is of good family, and I cannot tell how they may take it."

"And should Lucia di Valo die?" suggested Jim.

Giuseppe shrugged his shoulders.

"She is a woman," he said, "pretty, but most of the men are afraid of her. They admire her beauty as they do that of a tigress, but they would rather not be caged with her. Then the women—well, Lucia is charming, and the sex will not grieve so much about her as if she were plain or even ugly. They would also make more row over the death of an old woman than a young one. It is their way."

On the whole they derived comfort from the views expressed by Giuseppe. He knew his people, and could rightly gauge the result of all the recent hubbub on the island.

After so great a victory a feast was the fitting thing. It was proposed by Terry, seconded by Trimmer, and carried *nem. con.*, and the hour of seven in the evening chosen for it.

A rough-and-ready meal in the meanwhile was all that could be expected.

There was no lack of help, for Giuseppe and his countrymen were handy fellows, and Cobbles and Smith, the seamen, turned to with a will. Jim was going pig-shooting, so as to get some fresh meat for the feast, and Johnny Daw was invited to make one of the party, which included Dawson, Terry, Ganthony, and two or three more.

Morse had something to do more to his taste. An idea had entered into his head, and he was going to make a thorough inspection of the ruins of the back part of the castle—with what object he did not say.

Life, bustle, and joy everywhere. The youngsters, as they met, exchanged grasps of the hand, and executed impromptu dances without rhyme or reason. On every side such expressions as the following were heard:

"Who would have thought it?"

"Who could have dreamt of it?"

"Jim Gordon is a wonderful fellow?"

"So is Morse!"

"So are we all!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

In short, they had a difficulty in finding sufficient vent for the excitement within them.

Old Chorker swaggered about for a time as if he had done the whole thing, and he made a desperate attempt to patronise Cobbles and Smith. But they were two sturdy old seamen, and saw through him at

a glance. They were, moreover, assisted by Romeo to a correct estimate of Chorker's character.

"Look here, ole Chorker," said Romeo, "You got more wind in you sails dan you got licence to carry. Mind you don't turn turtle. Lie low. Sing small. Keep in de corner, as you oughter, after all de dirty work you done."

"Here, what's that?" cried Chorker, making a feeble attempt to bounce over Romeo.

To his astonishment, he was suddenly wheeling about and with a well-directed kick sent flying upon the back of Charley, which was lying hard by.

The bear, without getting up, turned his head and laid hold of Chorker's trousers, and probably a small allowance of flesh at the same time. Anyway, he howled dismally, and on his trousers ripping up he jumped to his feet and fled away.

"He am a skunk," said Romeo. "Sold de castle once and done him best to get us all chawed up. But Marse Gordon oberlook it, and to tink he come slock-dollerging roun' me! It make my blood bile."

"I took no count of him the moment I set eyes on him," said Cobbles. "What do he call hisself?"

Chorker's original position was explained to the seamen, who laughed contemptuously.

"A pretty swimming and sailing master he is, no doubt," grunted Smith; "he never been to sea no more than was necessary for him to get here. Now, what can we do to help you?"

"Dey cutting wood," replied Romeo; "if I might be so pressin' and so slicitus ob you help, perhaps you not mind fetchin' some in. Bring in bits 'bout de length for making up de fire."

"It's a job we are on right off," said Cobbles, as the pair rolled away.

CHAPTER CLXXVI.

THE SHOOTING-PARTY.—JOHNNY DAW AND JIM.



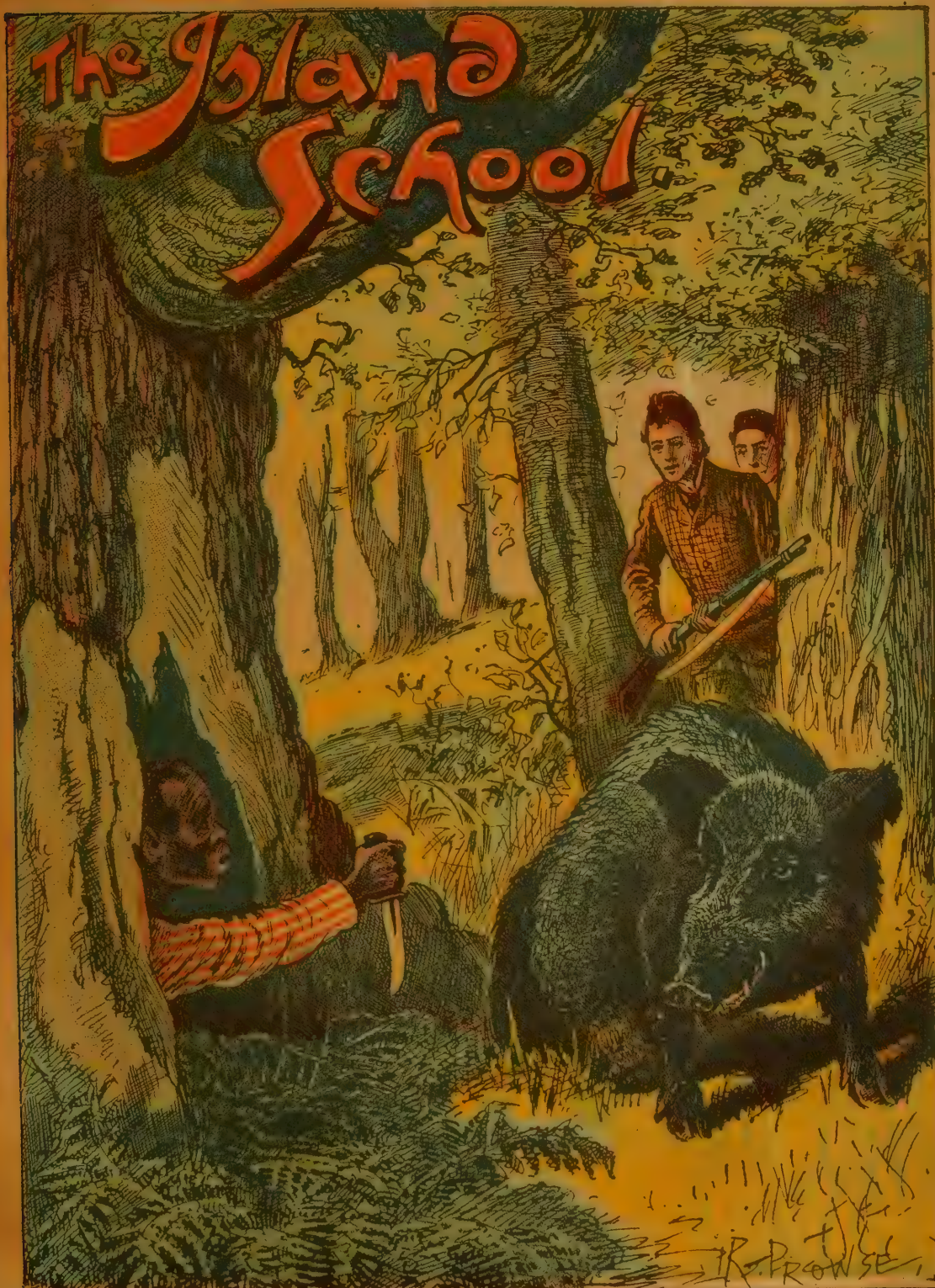
HEAR a grunter," said Dawson, as he pulled up short a little in advance of the rest of the party.

Some talking had been going on in a subdued tone. Jim and Johnny Daw hovered in the rear. Immediately after Dawson spoke they were all silent. Then

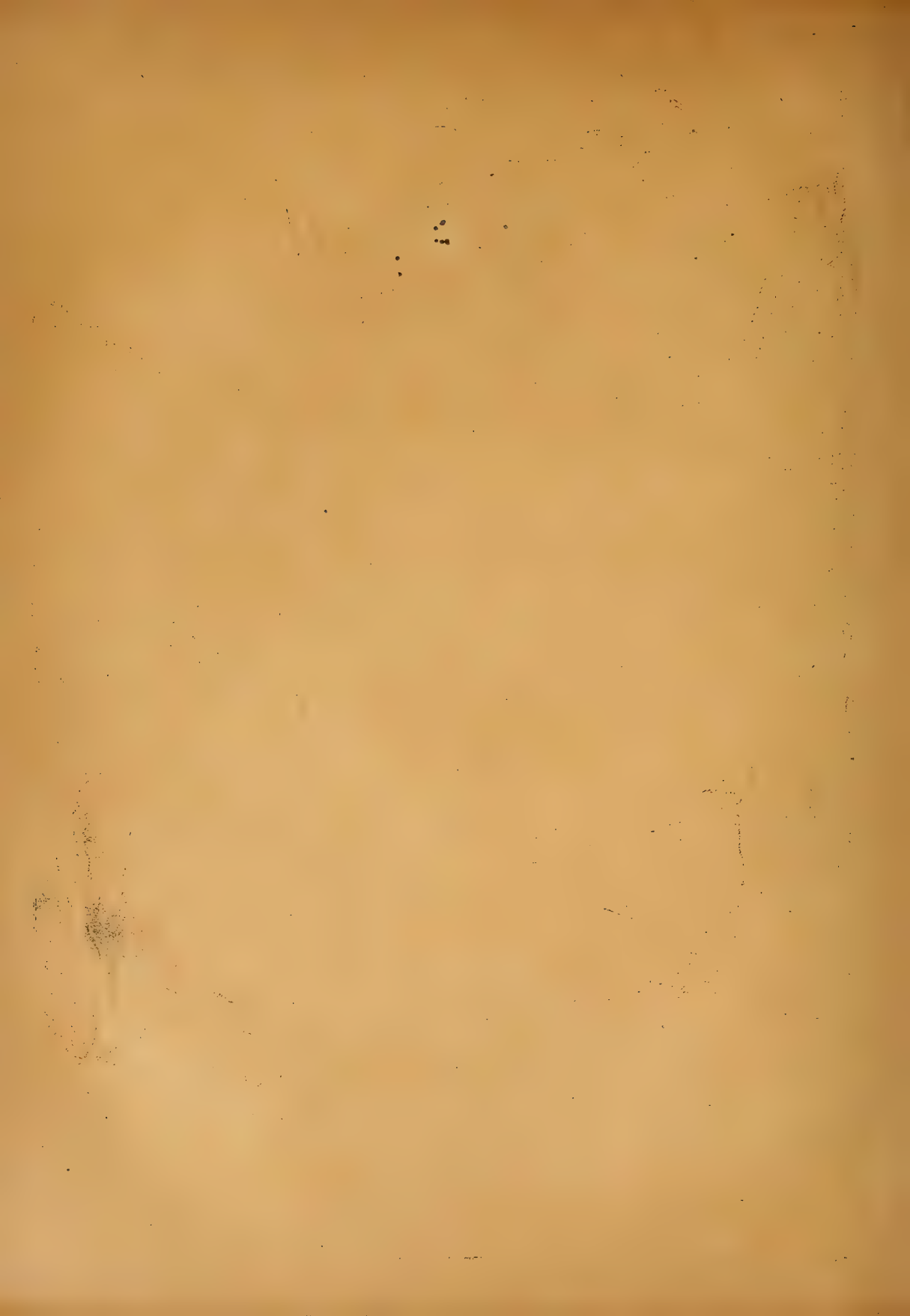
in the stillness that ensued they distinctly heard the satisfied grunt of a pig that was rooting, and not rooting in vain.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



"Now, you old fool," Rómeo was saying, "stan' back an' gib me a chance for a run, an' on de word ob a royal black genelman me leab de little pigs alone."



"It is a sow," said Terry, softly.

"I'll settle her alone," said Dawson. "She is my prey. I was the first to hear her."

"Mind you hit her," said Ganthony.

Dawson growled out something about hitting him if he were not quiet, and stepped forward a few paces with the caution of a moose-hunter. But he had not gone far when the sow appeared, walking slowly and grubbing up the loose soil between the trees with her snout.

She was so intent upon her feeding that she had no eyes or ears for an enemy. In this respect the boar is ever the keener animal. He is always on the alert, and is, on the whole, less greedy than his lady friend.

Dawson, standing with his legs wide apart, raised his rifle and proceeded to take aim. He was conscious of the presence of a stranger in the person of Johnny Daw, who might be critical, and a failure had to be avoided.

So Dawson's aim was a very steady one. It was so steady that ere he had made up his mind to pull the trigger the eyes of the feeding animal were raised, so that he was seen.

Dawson, being a little shortsighted, was not aware of the movement. Suddenly the sow, which he thought he had secure, made a rush in his direction. She came towards him like a flash of light, and in a hurry he pulled the trigger.

But in doing so he omitted to depress the rifle so as to shoot in a line with the approaching animal. The consequence was that the shot flew wide of the mark, and the sow came along direct at him.

It was an unusual thing for the females to charge, but this one may have been of exceptionally cantankerous disposition. Or she may have been ambitious, like many women in these days, of taking upon herself the whole duty of the stronger sex.

Whatever her motive, the animal dashed at Dawson, and before the echo of his rifle had died away, she, with wild, uncertain aim, rushed between his legs and caused him to turn the better part of a somersault. The next moment another rifle was heard, and the career of the bold sow was cut short with a bullet through her forehead.

It was Ganthony, who, in spite of his laughter, had fired with a true aim. Dawson, considerably astonished and crestfallen, arose to his feet and looked at his friends.

"I was taken by surprise there," he said, "but I think I hit her."

"Very likely," replied the successful shot, Ganthony, "but you did it so tenderly that there is no mark upon her."

As the sow was a young one, not more than a year old and in splendid condition, there was ample for

the day. Jim directed the making of a rough hurdle, on which the prize was to be carried home for Romeo to cut up into the requisite joints.

"I should like to have a shot at something," remarked Johnny Daw, "if it is only a squirrel."

"Very well," replied Jim. "I will go with you. It is easier to lose yourself in this wood than you imagine."

So they went on together, and the rest carried back the hurdle and its burden of toothsome meat.

But Johnny was not destined to get a shot at anything that morning. They walked on for a time seeing nothing bigger than a few insects tempted out by the warmth of the sun, which, as if rejoicing with the boys, beamed down with unwonted winter power. Jim went as far as he thought desirable, and then halted.

"We shall get nothing this morning," he said. "Those two shots scared away what there was. During the winter the great part of the boars go deeper into the wood. And there are more sheltered spots perhaps. On our side of the island we get what cold wind there is."

"I can have another try to-morrow, if you don't mind," said Daw.

"Yes, and the morrow after that," replied Jim, "and many morrows, I hope. You won't leave us just yet, I trust."

"I should be glad to stay with you for a year, as far as that goes. What will you do now?"

"About staying on the island, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I haven't had any time to think the matter over," said Jim, "and I doubt if any of us have. But one thing I am certain of—none will be in a hurry to go now. There are so many matters to settle up."

"I hardly know what to make of you yet," returned Johnny Daw, with a smile. "Of course, I heard from Giuseppe you were schoolboys, but you are very different from what I expected to find."

"We have changed very much since our troubles began."

"You would, naturally. But I only know half your story—that portion of it relating to Giuseppe. He told me all about your meeting on the other side of the island, and how you confounded him and his crew."

"He seems to bear no malice."

"Not a morsel. On the contrary, he recognises your worth and appreciates the generosity you showed in sparing his life. He thinks more of it, as he, acting under the orders of Espardo Reonardo, would, if he had captured you, certainly not have spared yours."

"A man who can be grateful must have some good in him."

"That is my opinion, Gordon. By the way, he told me something about a wonderful deserted city, somewhere in the heart of the island. I should like a glimpse at that, as I am endowed with the sailor's weakness for finding and inspecting strange places."

"I, too, want to go there," said Jim, "but we must settle down first. The school, as Farrell kept it, is smashed. More than two-thirds of our number, all the younger ones, were sent home. I do not know what that may lead to. Complaints, of course, and possibly interference with us by the Home Government."

"They would prosecute Farrell, you think?" suggested Daw.

"If they could find him. I think he must be dead, but we can learn all about that from Lucia di Valo."

"The pretty Spaniard lying wounded in the castle?"

"Yes; she will tell the truth. If Farrell is alive he is somewhere on the island. I do not think he would die of starvation without one try to get back to us."

"He may turn up soon."

"Possibly. But no more of his ruling for me. I have my notions of the future. Mr. Farrell can keep his book-learning for others. We who are left behind have nothing more to acquire from him. The school will have to be on an entirely different footing."

"I should dearly like to stay with you, Gordon, and see the thing out."

"Stay, by all means. You will be heartily welcome. There is a lot to do, of which I will give you the particulars after we return to the castle, and get time for a quiet chat. There is a ship lying on the other side, which I consider belongs to us. We also can claim all we have found in the castle, and in a cave yonder I have some parcels we got out of a derelict to overhaul. In short, all sorts of things to occupy us right through the winter, and, if I am not mistaken, into the ensuing summer."

"Much may happen meanwhile," hinted Johnny Daw.

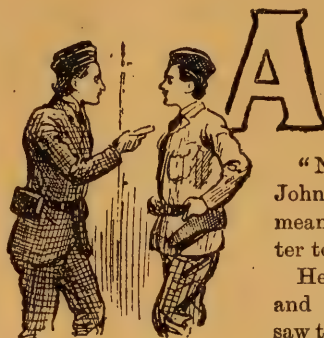
"True," said Jim, "but whatever may turn up we can hold our own."

"Your friends at home may insist on our return?"

"No," replied Jim, with a smile. "I do not think that the greater part of our friends will worry. But let us get back. Nothing in the way of sport to-day, but you may get better luck to-morrow."

CHAPTER CLXXVII.

THE SKELETON AT THE FEAST.



NOTE from Eveline," said Morse, as he met Jim at the gate. "What, no more pigs?"

"Not to-day," replied Johnny Daw. "But I mean to have a big slaughter to-morrow."

He put down his rifle, and Morse, glancing at it, saw the cap upon the nipple.

"You are not what the world calls a sportsman," he said.

"How do you know that?" demanded Daw, raising his eyebrows.

"No good sportsman," replied Morse, "comes within fifty yards of his home with his gun loaded. He either draws the charge or fires it off. This rule, of course, is confined to sport, and not to military work."

"I never thought of it," said Daw. "How do you extract a charge?"

Morse smiled, and drawing the ramrod, showed him where the top unscrewed. A reversible corkscrew then came to light.

"Put this down the muzzle," he said, "and give it a twist or two. The screw will go through the wad, and then you can draw it. The bullet or shot will slip out. Repeat the same process with the powder, and there you are. Take off the cap first, and carefully lower the hammer. That's it."

While Johnny Daw was receiving this necessary lesson from Morse, Jim opened the letter and found it was very short.

"Thought you would like to know how *she* is. Always singing your praises, especially when she ought to be quiet. Wants to see you when she gets better."

"EVELINE."

"Too many shes here," muttered Jim; "rather a cranky letter. I suppose I have done something wrong, after all. Bother the women and the girls, there is always something queer with them!"

But he was still further puzzled by the appearance of Dibble, who sidled up to him and thrust another note into his hand.

"I was asked to give you this," he whispered, "and not let anybody see."

Jim half expected it was from Lucia, but a glance at it showed that it was Eveline's writing. Opening it, he read the following curious epistle.

"I am really very foolish—horribly mean, and you must forgive me, dear Jim. Lucia is an angel."

"I'll be hanged if she is!" thought Jim, as he thrust both the letters into his pocket. "However, if Eveline chooses to think so, that is her affair."

The preparations for the evening feast were well on their way. Cobbles and Smith had been out to get some winter-bloom for the table, and with a species of wild chrysanthemum of varying colours, they had made quite a show. The air was pleasantly laden with the smell of cooking pork and boiling vegetables—not the aroma for the æsthetic young man, but decidedly to the taste of hungry boys.

Jim returned about five o'clock, and he spent much of the intervening time talking in a quiet way with Morse.

They had a great variety of views to exchange.

There were plans for the future to be considered, too, but these were not much discussed. For the moment they simply reviewed their present position.

By-and-by the board was spread. Right loyally had Romeo and his assistants worked. Not the least among the latter were Giuseppe's followers. They were half-gipsy rascals accustomed to looking after themselves, and cunning in many ways of cooking the simplest things so as to make them palatable.

There was pork, and warmed-up tinned meat turned into a hash with potatoes and herbs; likewise, baked and fried potatoes, and many other viands manufactured out of a simple assortment of materials. Never before had the table been so nobly spread.

The ladies did not join the party. For them Romeo conveyed a portion of the food to their room. They wished it to be so, as they were still suffering from the fatigue and weakness arising from recent exposure.

Thus the boys and the men had the hall to themselves. Jim took the head of the table, and Martin was desired to act as vice-chairman.

For those who wished it there was some of the old wine found in the castle vaults. The men were not averse to it, but the boys, remembering its strength, shunned it. They had plenty of light spirits without the aid of wine.

Chorker had no place at the table. He was requested by Romeo to take a "back seat," which he did without demur, in a corner, where, with a plate of food upon his knees, he fared as well as he could hope to do.

There was no thought of an intruding enemy, no fear of anything. The platform by the castle gates was drawn away, and the gates were open. So was the door of the hall, for, with so many there, a little fresh air was desirable.

There was the inevitable loud talking and abundance of laughter. Jokes that had no occasion to be very profound, were received with hearty merriment. Laughter everywhere. All joy and no thought or

care for the morrow. Suddenly Dibble was seen to turn pale. He sat at the upper end of the table, not far from the door, towards which his eyes were directed. It was Rainstone who first marked his change of colour, and he also looked towards the doorway. Immediately every vestige of colour fled from his cheeks.

There, standing in the doorway, with the darkness of night for a background, was the figure of a pinch-faced man with hair and meagre beard, his eyes wandering about wildly, and one of his hands extended like that of the poor old man in "The Beggar's Petition."

A moment later, and all eyes were upon the strange visitant. Jim, in his position at the head of the table, was nearest to him, and springing out of his seat, he cried:

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Boys—I am starving," was the reply, "for days and days I have lived as the beasts of the field."

"Merciful Heaven, it is Nap Farrell!"

The familiar way of speaking of the schoolmaster came naturally from Jim's lips. It was followed by a general cry of alarm.

"Keep quiet, boys," sang out Jim. "Somebody put a chair by the fire for him."

It was done, and Jim, taking all that was left of the schoolmaster by the arm, led him to the welcome seat. The arm he held was little more than skin and bone.

"You are kind—you always were," murmured the schoolmaster, raising his lustreless eyes to Jim's face—"you always were. I thought you would take me in even if my own flesh and blood turned against me."

"Give me some of that wine," said Jim.

A mug of it was passed to him by Martin. Jim put it to the lips of the famished man and bade him drink warily.

"Only a little before you eat," he said.

"It warms me," muttered the schoolmaster, "and I haven't been warm for days and nights. Give me a little more."

"Eat first," said Jim, authoritatively.

Some meat and potatoes were handed to him, and he ate, but not so ravenously as they expected. He was too weary and worn for fast eating. But he finished the welcome fare, and leant back in the chair with a sigh.

"I am better now," he softly said.

Then Jim gave him some more wine, and after that a further supply of food. Finally, a third dose of wine.

"That will do now," said Jim.

"I was coming to the castle," said Mr. Farrell, speaking very slowly amidst a breathless silence, "and was two days on the road. I had to crawl most of the

way. I got near it on the cliff in the rear at dawn this morning, and witnessed your return. I had previously heard the firing of guns, but thought they were only in my disordered brain. But when I saw the boats cross the lagoon I knew you had been doing brave work—as usual."

He stopped for breath, and glanced at a mug of wine which Jim held. It was but half empty, and he gave the schoolmaster a little more.

"Since then I have been crawling and walking, step by step, inch by inch. Oh, the weary way! I stopped by the ruin at the back of the castle, and wondered how it could have been brought about. Then I must have fainted, for it was dark when I found myself moving again. So I have come on here, to be received by you—as I—knew I should be. You are very good, boys."

The change in his appearance was very great. It was terrible—appalling. He looked many years older, and had lost every particle of flesh that could be spared from his bones and leave him alive.

"You have not asked about Mrs. Farrell," suggested Jim.

It was a reminder that he took somewhat irritably.

"Mrs. Farrell has not suffered as I have done," he said. "I saw her alive and well."

"But she has suffered, too," said Jim. "She has also been anxious about you. At this moment she believes you to be dead."

"And wished it, perhaps."

"No. You misjudge her. She has all through been very reasonable and kind. She would never have deserted you."

This was a home-thrust. The schoolmaster sat silent for a few moments with his eyes upon the fire.

"She will hardly know me," he said, at last.

"I must prepare her for the change in you. She is upstairs with a wounded woman—Lucia di Valo."

"Have they given refuge to that she-fiend?"

"It is not for you to question any course we may take with others."

Jim was a bit peremptory with him, and the schoolmaster shrank under it.

"If you approve," he said, "it is not for me to object."

"I will go to Mrs. Farrell," rejoined Jim. "No, you cannot have any more wine just now; it is very strong. Remain here. I shall not be long."

CHAPTER CLXXVIII.

THE RULING PASSION IS NOT ALLOWED TO RULE.



JIM departed, and the schoolmaster, leaning back in his seat, shut his eyes. The boys and men stood about, talking of the strange arrival in whispers. They hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry.

The return of the schoolmaster offered several problems for solution, none of which were they in a position to solve.

Would he endeavour again to take the head of affairs?

What would be the reception that Mrs. Farrell would give him?

Would he, after all, survive the terrible privations he had undergone?

These and other things were whispered about during the twenty minutes Jim was absent from the hall.

When he returned, it was not Mrs. Farrell who was with him, but Miss Elegantine. She looked at the weird figure of the man, prematurely grown old and dirty, ragged, pinched, and but the shadow of his former self, with eyes wide open, unable at the outset to really believe that this indeed was the original Napoleon Farrell. He opened his eyes and stared at her in return.

"So you are here still?" he said.

"Yes," she replied, "we are all here; no thanks to you, I am afraid. Come, I am going to help you upstairs."

"I can't walk upstairs," he answered, querulously.

"Then I must carry you," she said, calmly.

He made a movement of dissent, and got upon his feet.

"If I can have a little more of that wine," he said, "I can manage it."

Jim let him have a little more, and, taking the arm of the gaunt woman, the schoolmaster shuffled across the hall.

They disappeared, and Jim closed the door.

"A meeting between husband and wife," he said, "under such circumstances, was not for our eyes."

"That is so," was the general response.

They returned to their seats, but the gilt had been taken off the feast and the mirth; such as there was, was forced.

To Giuseppe this scene was not so clear as to the

old occupants of the castle. Nor did Johnny Daw quite grasp it. They could see that the schoolmaster had suffered, but knew nothing of the changes in him beyond the unmistakable signs of recent starvation.

But in a little while the freezing effects of the return of the schoolmaster began to disappear. A thaw set in, and Giuseppe fairly scattered all the ice by volunteering to sing a Spanish song.

After it had been sung and applauded, he and the men, to the music of their own voices, danced the bolero, then Cobbles and Smith obliged with the British hornpipe. Ganthony sang, and after that somebody else. Daw came out with something comic, and Romeo obliged with a ditty in which the "yaller gal," so dear to the negro heart, was very prominent.

So the time went on until ten o'clock, when Jim, who believed in being merry and wise, said it was time for bed.

For the night Giuseppe and his men could be accommodated with beds. On the morrow they were going back to Minorca, where an interview with the governor would be asked, and, if granted, a few facts laid before him, which were expected "to shake him up a bit."

"He will only be glad for the whole thing to be hushed up, for if the matter reached the higher authorities of the land, his recall and disgrace will be inevitable," said Giuseppe.

As a matter of simple precaution the gates were closed, and in half an hour everything in the castle was quiet.

Whatever was the nature of the interview between husband and wife, it was not known to the boys, beyond that, to outward appearance, they were reconciled.

In the morning Mrs. Farrell came down and had an interview with Jim and Morse. She had the red-eyed look of one who has not slept all night.

"He fell asleep early," she said, "and is sleeping still. Of the future I have nothing to say."

"The old order of things cannot be resumed," said Jim.

"Assuredly not," added Marse.

"I do not expect it, nor has Mr. Farrell the right to look for it," replied Mrs. Farrell; "but it is early days to talk of that yet."

They assented to that. Then Jim hesitatingly asked how Eveline had borne the meeting.

"She is very sorry for her father," answered Mrs. Farrell, "and will remember that she is his child. Both of us must think of duty, more than our own feelings and convenience."

It was the answer they might have expected, and they had nothing to say against it. Mrs. Farrell left

them, and Jim went out to find Giuseppe, who had gone down to get his boat ready for sea.

They met upon the beach as Giuseppe finished his work, and returned together.

"I wanted to have a talk with you," said Jim, "on the matter of your return here. You will come back to us ere long, I hope?"

"Is it possible you will remain long here, senor?" exclaimed Giuseppe, his dark eyes open wide.

"Some of us will," said Jim. "I have plans that require thinking out and getting into shape. You may be of great service to me."

"Senor, to be of service to you I would go round the world."

"Then you will come back?"

"My life on it!"

"Should we not be here," said Jim, "you will find us on the other side of the island, where we first met. How long will you be gone?"

"Not more than a week, I hope, senor," said Giuseppe; "but I shall remain until I know what the governor will do. If for being nothing more than a fool of the first water, he ought to have a knife planted between his ribs."

"No bloodshed on my account, I beg of you," said Jim.

"Senor, I spoke as a Spaniard. In your cause I will act as an Englishman."

Breakfast awaited them, and was quickly disposed of. Afterwards, all but those who had household duties to perform—they included the negroes, Harac and Maravello, and Chorker—accompanied the smuggler's party down to the beach to give them a cheer as a send-off.

It was a lively scene, and many of the boys determined to accompany the bigger boat to the mouth of the lagoon in smaller rowing-craft.

Quite a procession was formed, and the final cheer was not given until Giuseppe's boat was fully a mile on its way.

Then some of the boys went off for a stroll, and Jim, Morse, Daw, and a dozen others started for the castle.

"A holiday to-day," cried Jim to the pleasure-seekers, "but there will be work to-morrow. The first thing to be done," he added, addressing Morse, "will be to make a path to the castle."

"I was thinking of it this morning shortly after I was awake," replied Morse. "It won't be quite so direct as before, but some of the chief obstacles, such as a rock like that, I can soon clear away."

He pointed to a boulder that must have weighed fifty tons at the least. Daw stared at him in astonishment. He thought Morse was joking. Jim observed the look, and laughed.

"Morse will make very light of lifting that," he said.

"Oh, come!" exclaimed Johnny Daw, "draw it mild."

"He will require the assistance of two friends," continued Jim.

"Forty or fifty, you mean."

"No. The names of Morse's friends are dynamite and melenite, both of which he is in the habit of communing with."

"You are a strange lot of fellows," said Daw, under his breath.

They climbed up to the castle and passed in. Jim, who was a step or two in advance of the rest, heard a row going on in the hall, and Romeo's voice very evident.

"Not me," he was saying, "you go and lor' it ober oder niggers. We hab had 'nuff ob you."

"Obey me or quit the castle," answered a cracked voice. "I am feeble and broken, but I am still master here."

Jim understood now. It was the schoolmaster making an effort to regain his authority. With a flushed face he stalked into the hall and saw Mr. Farrell seated by the fire, wagging his head angrily at Romeo and the other men who were grouped together with the stamp of rebellion upon their faces.

"Mr. Farrell," said Jim, firmly but politely, "I cannot allow you to interfere with matters here."

"Gordon—I—I——" The schoolmaster quailed before the angry eye of the youth. He half-rose from his chair and sat down again.

"For the present," continued Jim, "I must continue to rule. After all that has transpired, I wonder at you, Mr. Farrell!"

"You helped me in the hour of need. Do not thrust that into my teeth, Gordon."

"I am not thinking of that," said Jim, "but of your mismanagement, without mentioning something worse. Here I am master for the time. Not so much by my own will as by the wishes of my friends. You must obey me as well as the rest. Not that I shall put any great tax of obedience upon you."

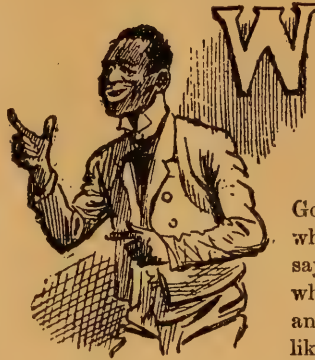
"And if I refuse?"

"You will be made a prisoner!"

The resolute tone of the answer ended the controversy. The schoolmaster got up from the chair, and leaning on a stick he had with him, shuffled from the hall.

CHAPTER CLXXIX.

COMING TO TERMS.



"HAT was the matter here?" asked Jim.

He looked to Romeo for an answer, which came promptly.

"Fust ob all, Marse Gordon, he want to know whar de wine kept. He say he got a pain some-whar. Me 'fuse to say, and den he order us 'bout like a lot ob cattle. We

not mind him, and he lay on 'tick wif abusive words."

Jim had the key of the vaults, which he now resolved not to part with to anyone. Bidding the men go on with his work, he left the hall, and outside met Johnny Daw, between whom and himself there was a fast-growing friendship.

"I say, Jim," said Daw, "it is astonishing how things slip the mind. We forgot all those wounded fellows we left on the beach."

"I did not forget them," replied Jim, quietly.

"Where are they?"

"Gone home."

"Home?"

"Giuseppe attended to their wounds and sent them home in one of Lucia di Valo's boats. There were but five left alive, besides the prisoners who went with them, and they had four out of the number able to sail the craft. It was the better thing to do, for them and for us."

"I suppose it was," said Daw, reflecting.

"They won't make any fuss about things here," said Jim, "but rather be glad to avoid all reference to their failure. Among their own friends they will be cared for. I did not mention their going yesterday, as everybody seemed to be merry, and wounded men are not an agreeable subject."

* * * * *

There was so much to do that it was not easy to decide where to begin. Woodcutting, however, was imperative, and ten of the boys, with Martin, went to work in the pathway, where there was a lot of timber lying ready for cutting up.

It had been blown down by Morse on that memorable night, and he now advocated its removal as a preliminary to reconstructing the way.

Morse wanted the rest of the men, save the three negroes, at the back of the castle. He had a project for clearing the ruins and making use of the material.

Of this we shall hear more anon. Meanwhile, Jim learnt from Mrs. Farrell that the schoolmaster had

been giving way to anger, and having excited himself, was now on the borders of a fever. This was imparted to Jim about an hour after his decisive treatment of Mr. Farrell.

"You must not be hard on him," pleaded Mrs. Farrell, "I am sure you won't. At the best of times he is foolish and weak. Now he is so utterly broken that he is little more than a child."

"I have no desire," replied Jim, "to be hard upon him. But you will admit, Mrs. Farrell, that the old state of things has passed away."

"Assuredly I do. The school as it was can never be restored."

"Never, and it will be better so. Mr. Farrell, by-and-by, when he is strong enough, will have a proposition from me, which he will, if he is wise, accede to. But for the present things must go on as they are."

"Heaven knows, Gordon," said Mrs. Farrell, with tears in her eyes, "that both Eveline and myself are fully conscious of all we owe you. But at the back of everything there is the duty of a wife and a daughter."

Jim bowed by way of assent.

"If Mr. Farrell were your father you would not condemn him."

"No. It would not be right for me to do so."

"Therefore, Gordon, you will understand our position."

"I understand it thoroughly, Mrs. Farrell," said Jim; "but recent events have almost made a man of me, and I understand mine. While wishing to do what is right and just, I can never place myself under the ruling of Mr. Farrell again."

"You would be foolish if you did," returned Mrs. Farrell. "But what can you boys do? There is nothing for it but for you all to return home."

Jim smiled quietly, but said nothing by way of assent or dissent to this suggestion.

"How is *Senorita di Valo* progressing?" he inquired.

"Much better than we could hope for, seeing how seriously injured she was. The bullet seems to have glanced off one of her ribs, and passed out of her side. I cannot tell if the rib is broken. In her opinion it is not, which is little less than a miracle."

"She is mending, then?"

"In a way, Gordon, but altering in another respect. She is strangely quiet and subdued—broken, I suppose, is the exact word."

"One can hardly marvel at it," mused Jim. "To risk so much, and to lose all. I believe she has spoken of me?"

"Always in praise of you."

"I was not thinking of her speaking in that way. Does she talk of going back to her home?"

"She says that she will never return."

"And what will she do, then?" asked Jim, surprised. "She does not say. Eveline has acquired a strong influence over her."

"Kindness could do no less."

"Not kindness alone would have done it. This *Senorita di Valo* seems to me to have suddenly awakened to the knowledge of having made a terrible mistake. But what it is I cannot tell, save that all she has done was in error."

"I think I know," said Jim. "Now, Mrs. Farrell, I must leave you. I wish that, when talking with Mr. Farrell, you will get at his ideas of the future. Probably he will wish to return to England."

"I do not think so," replied Mrs. Farrell. "But as soon as possible I will endeavour to make some arrangement that will suit you both."

Jim knew what he required, and what he meant to have, but said nothing more just then. On leaving Mrs. Farrell he went round to the back of the castle, where Morse with his assistants was engaged in piling up the wrecked stonework into orderly heaps.

"You want to get at the kitchen?" said Jim, interrogatively.

"That is the first idea," replied Morse. "Of course, most of the things have suffered, but I hope to save all the metal utensils. Those that are battered we can put shipshape again."

"You are taking special pains with the stones."

"Yes, Jim; they will be wanted again."

Harac and Maravello were engaged in chipping off the mortar and cement from the stones, using a piece of strong iron hooping for the purpose. Jim looked at them curiously.

"Jim," said Morse, "can't you guess what I am thinking of?"

"No."

"You are getting dull in your old age. Now I know you intend to remain for some time upon the island."

"I told you so."

"And so do I, and most, if not all, of us. Now, although we shall wander a bit, in parties anyway, we must have some sort of home, and the castle is—well, it isn't quite so nice as it was at the start."

"It is not."

"Then it comes to this, Jim. We must build a home, and I propose to do it with this material for walls. Sleery knows how to do the woodwork, the windows, doors, and roof, and surely we shall be able to make a snug barracks for us all."

"Including the Farrells?"

"No. If they remain upon the island they must have a home of their own. Why, Jim, there is material enough here to build what we require, and a dozen houses."

"Where is the mortar to come from?"

"Sand we have without stint, and I know where chalk can be found. I have been reading up how to burn lime, and a kiln will be started soon."

"You are a fellow, Morse. Is there any thing you cannot do?"

"Others might do the same if they would only put their brains to work."

But Jim only shook his head.

"It all depends how the brains work when they are set going," he said, and having uttered this truism, he went away with his brain busy with schemes for the future.

They were a merry party down by the old pathway, and the sound of the saw mingled with the cheery laughter of the youngsters.

Johnny Daw was there working with his coat off, as if sawing wood was the one pleasure of his life. He had thought of going shooting again, but gave up pleasure to make himself useful.

Jim noticed that the tree-trunks were being cut into regular lengths, and laid in heaps according to size. He commented upon it to Martin, who informed him that they were acting upon the instructions they had received from Sleery.

"And where is Sleery?" asked Jim.

"Over yonder preparing a saw-pit. He has been looking out the old cross-cut saws."

"Morse is losing no time, as usual," thought Jim. "I wonder if we shall be left at peace now?"

That evening, after a busy day, the boys were assembled in the hall, when Mrs. Farrell appeared, and beckoned to Jim.

"Will you come up and see my husband?" she whispered. "He wishes to arrive at an understanding with you."

Jim said he was glad of it, and followed her from the room, leaving his wondering friends behind him.

CHAPTER CLXXX.

THE NEW ORDER OF THINGS.



MR. FARRELL was in bed, where he was lying propped up with pillows. He was very pale, and Jim saw that the threatened fever had passed away. Mrs. Farrell, as soon as she had shown Jim into the room, left the master and old pupil together.

"Sit down, Gordon," said the schoolmaster;

"there is a chair—only one here, and a poor thing;

but the old place was terribly wrecked, and we must make the best of what we have."

Jim sat down upon the solitary chair by the bedside, a strong contrast in his healthy, muscular appearance to the wan and broken man.

"I fear," he said, "that talking will fatigue you, sir. Let us come to the point without any loss of time."

"Certainly, Gordon. You were always prompt in word and action. In the first place, I intend to remain on the island."

"Will that be wise?"

"I dare not go back, Gordon. In the old country I should be subjected to all sorts of actions, that would ruin me. I might even be prosecuted for obtaining money under false pretences. But I was not guilty of that."

"I do not believe you intended to deceive us, sir."

"Thank you for that, Gordon. No, I was simply a conceited idiot. I see it all now."

Jim had seen it for a long time, and he could not dissent from the admission of the schoolmaster. He merely nodded slightly, as if he knew it, but thought it of no consequence now.

"After the terrible punishment inflicted on our enemies, Gordon," pursued Mr. Farrell, "we shall now be left in peace."

"I hope so, sir."

"You are not sure?"

"I cannot be until Giuseppe returns."

"Who is Giuseppe?"

Jim briefly explained that he was a Spaniard who had acted as a friend.

"For all that, I wouldn't trust him," said Mr. Farrell, shaking his head. "They are a mean, treacherous lot."

Jim thought of certain things the schoolmaster had done, and smiled. He thought that treachery and meanness are not confined to one nation or class of people.

"How will his coming back affect us, Gordon?"

"He will be able to inform me about the view taken of matters by the Governor of Minorca, and the friends of the fallen men."

"I see. And if the news is favourable?"

"We intend to remain here openly in that case. But, at all events, we do not intend to leave at present, and should there still be trouble in the air, we intend to shift our quarters."

"Where to?"

"That is not fully decided."

"If I could be at peace here," said Mr. Farrell, "I would be content with a quiet cottage in some corner with a garden, and a man or so to help with the work. I have still private means sufficient left to

carry on a home of that description with comfort, and even liberality."

"Do you desire to live alone?" asked Jim.

"No, no. My wife and daughter would be with me, and perhaps I could persuade an old friend of mine to come and stay with me, for a time, anyway. I feel that I want a long rest."

Jim sat thinking for a few moments. Provided the report from Giuseppe proved favourable, the idea might be carried out. Of course there would be Mrs. Farrell and Eveline to consult, but the scheme had its advantages.

Jim and his friends would be living a life of freedom, and Eveline would not be so far away. Jim liked the notion of a sort of settlement being formed. He knew that it would not last for ever, or for any length of time, but it would suit his views.

There was another matter, too, that would have to be attended to. It would be necessary to obtain some sort of consent to remaining there from his friends. And the same might be said of the others. They all had somebody who might "put a spoke in the wheel of the arrangement," and must be induced to acquiesce in it.

"Broadly, sir," he said, "I feel that your idea is a good one. But when the time arrives for us to part, there must be a clear understanding as to terms. You will want a house built?"

"Why, yes," murmured Mr. Farrell, "of course I shall. Sleery would see to that."

"I cannot say. Sleery considers himself a free agent now. You would have to employ and pay him in the usual way. But I think you may cease to be anxious. We shall be able to come to terms. Whatever we may do in your interest can be paid in kind. We have a fair supply of goods in the store-room, but you might, when you are well enough to write, order an additional supply. Now would be the season for working. Having selected a spot for your house, we could proceed with the building and laying out your garden. When the spring comes, a very little attention will keep it going."

"Practical, as usual."

"I will make also a list of seeds and tools, that will be useful to us and to you," pursued Jim. "You can order them with the other things, and we should get them at the latest early in January. We can hold out until then."

"I see a very pleasant life before me, even now," said Mr. Farrell. "By the way, Gordon, you spoke of exchanging labour for goods. There is another thing I should like to be thrown in."

"What is that, sir?"

"Some of that wine. It is the most reviving thing I ever drank. It must be very old."

"It is."

"You boys do not drink it, I hope?"

"It would only be used in case of sickness," replied Jim, with a dry smile.

"Wise of you," said Mr. Farrell; "it is essentially a drink for men. How did you come possessed of it?"

"I think we have talked sufficiently for the present," said Jim, rising. "Mrs. Farrell shall have a bottle of the wine to give to you, as she may think proper."

"But surely, Gordon, you can trust me with it?"

"When you are well. For whatever your other failings may be, sir, you are a sober man. But in your weak state the temptation to take a little too much would be very great."

"You do not mean to part with more of it than you can help, I see."

"I do not. I fancy that a good many people at home would give me a guinea a bottle for it. But you shall not want for a bottle of good light wine by-and-by, provided we come to an arrangement. Good-bye for the present, sir."

"Bless you, Gordon!" exclaimed Mr. Farrell, quite fervently.

Jim had been gone a long time, and on his return to the hall there were many curious eyes cast upon him. He saw no reason for reserve. The matter he had been discussing was quite an open one.

"I have been talking to Nap," he said, "about the future. He wants a house built, and is willing to pay for it. I think that the best thing he can do will be to settle down. We can hold our own here, I believe, boys."

"I hoped he was going right away," growled Trimmer.

"Jim had other views," whispered Terry, in his ear. "Of course. He is spoony on Eveline. She will bring us more trouble yet," muttered Trimmer.

"You are a croaker," said Terry; "a regular raven. We needn't worry about Farrell, as we are going to live with him never no more—never no more."

"There is one thing about Nap," said Jim, "that shows the inborn selfishness in the man. It is incurable. He went away with the under-masters, Storeby and Turner, and he has made no inquiry concerning them."

"Did he say how it was they became separated?" asked Rainstone.

"He did not mention them at all," said Jim, "and I do not see what we can do. The task of exploring the whole island is too much for us. If living, they ought to find their way back to us. But I may say that if any of you volunteer for a search there will be no objection on my part."

"I think it right something should be done," remarked Morse.

"I'll go," cried out Johnny Daw.

"I am willing to join you," said Dawson

"So am I," cried Dibble.

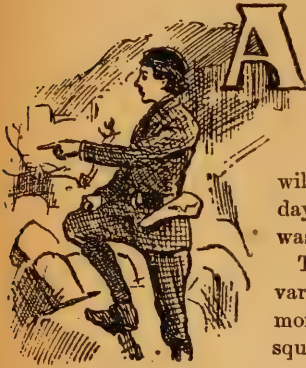
"That will suffice," said Jim, "we cannot spare many of our workers."

The preliminaries were then arranged. The trio were to start on the morrow and travel by the beach as far as three miles beyond Silver Bay, and then turn inward and work their way home by the chine.

If no signs of the missing men were discovered, a route would be selected for the next day, and so on, for a week. If no clue to the fate of the men was obtained, the search was then to be given up.

CHAPTER CLXXXI.

HOUSE-BUILDING.—THE PARTY IN SEARCH FOR THE MISSING MEN.



A VERY busy time was now begun. Morse hastened on the work of clearing away the ruins of the castle wall, and having willing assistants, in two days a vast amount of work was got through with.

The stones were of various sizes, some not more than six inches square, others two or even three feet in length.

They appeared to have been quarried by independent workers who had shaped the stone according to their individual fancy.

The old-time builders, however, succeeded in fitting them together with considerable judgment and picturesque effect, and so they had remained until Morse, with his explosives, dislodged them.

He was, moreover, engaged in making a lime-kiln near a piece of chalky ground, about a mile away, in the direction of the chine. With his keen eyes ever on the watch for things of interest, he had noted it long before, and conceived that it might one day be turned to account.

That day had now come, and so far he ranked as a prophet. But he did not arrogate to himself that high gift which enables a few—a very few—to dive into the future.

Then there was the spot to be selected for their house, the plans mapped out, and the foundations dug. Morse was responsible for the plans, and the carrying out would devolve on Martin and Sleery as foremen, and the boys as workers.

Simplicity was the main feature of the plan Morse had in his mind. The principal building was to be sixty feet long and one storey high. In front, two

doors, one at either end, with a number of small windows open to the air, except when closed with shutters, for at present they had no glass to glaze them with.

The back, which would look out upon the wood, was to be pierced for shooting, but with no other opening, whatever. The roof to be first covered with rough planking, and then over that with clay, into which a sort of thatch, made out of fibre of the trailing plants, was to be fixed.

Around the whole he proposed to put up a stockade, twenty feet from the main building.

Nor did his plan stop here. Keeping in mind the way the castle had been supplied with water, he resolved to search for the pipe that led the water from the spring, and shift it so as to bring water to a room in the big Long House, as the building was to be named. There it would fall into a tank, keep up a continual supply, and the surplusage be carried off by a simple arrangement of a drain that would run under the stockade, and so bear the water away.

All these things he rapidly sketched out, and exhibited to his approving companions. The spot chosen was in a direct line just behind the castle. There the soil appeared to be sandy and light, easily worked, and healthy to live upon. Most of the trees in front were to be cleared away, leaving just a fringe on the border of the wood.

Nothing was done towards the suggested residence for Mr. Farrell, schoolmaster no more. It was decided to leave that until he was in a condition of body to look about for himself, and in a mind that would enable him to make a judicious selection.

Working parties were appointed, each and all to his duty, with others or by himself, and thus the days went swiftly by until the better part of the week had passed.

By that time Morse had his amateur lime-kiln going: with a promise of great success, and the foundations were dug for the stone walls.

One of the pleasures—they were very few—in the lives of the women-folk was for them to come out in the afternoon and watch the boys at work.

Jim was here, there, and everywhere, but he sometimes found time to explain what was being done, and was rewarded with their unqualified approval.

"It is the most romantic thing I ever heard of," said Miss Elegantine. "I wish I had been born a man."

"You would have been a boy first," said her nephew, who was standing by.

There had been a time, and it was not long ago, when she would have turned upon him and taken exception to the remark, either by word or deed, but since her stay upon the rocky shore, outside the lagoon, she had been a changed woman.

She was always kind now, sometimes even tender, to the boy.

Meanwhile the search-party had explored here and there, finding nothing, and at last all hope of coming upon Storeby and Turner was abandoned. It was an unsatisfactory termination of their labours, but there was no help for it. So they joined the army of builders, and the first batch of lime being ready, mortar was made and the wall begun.

The foundation stone was laid by Eveline with fitting solemnity, the usual ceremony of putting some record of the time and the builders being duly observed. Martin cut a hole in the stone. It was one of the largest, and a bottle, with a written statement, and some odd money of the period, therein inserted and buried in mortar.

Then they sang "Rule Britannia," and gave three cheers. After that the meeting broke up, and they had a jovial evening.

"How long will it take to build the Long House?" asked Jim of Sleery.

"A month, at the least," was the reply, "if it is to be done well, of course."

"Build it," said Morse, "as if you meant to defy me to blow it up."

"I couldn't promise to build like that," said Sleery.

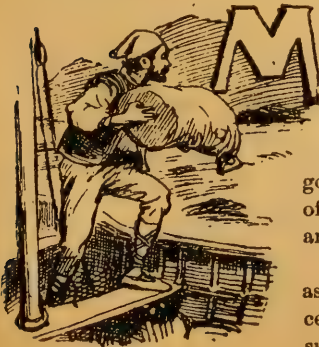
The next morning a sail was reported approaching the island, and, with the aid of the telescope, it was seen to have but one man in it, and that was Giuseppe.

Jim also saw that he had a number of packages at the bottom of the boat, and organised a party of porters—Harac, Maravello, Changeling, Chorker, and the three niggers, to bring whatever he had with him to the castle.

They were in time to greet him as he entered the lagoon and ran his boat ashore.

CHAPTER CLXXXII.

ARRIVAL OF THE MAILS.—DIBBLE'S FORTUNE.



cases.

"I thought, senor," he said, "that, while I was

with my people, I might bring along some tobacco for the men, also a trifle of brandy and quinine in case of fever. There are melon-seeds, too, and some cloth that may be handy for old clothing. Needles and thread, too, signor."

"You have proved yourself an invaluable friend," replied Jim.

Having despatched the men on with the parcels and boxes, he lingered behind with Giuseppe, who, as yet, had said nothing about the attitude taken up by the governor.

The Spaniard put the sails and masts in order in his boat, and was ready to accompany Jim to the castle.

"What of the governor, Giuseppe?"

"Senor," was the reply, "he is a most unwarrantable mule. He will say nothing, but hums and ha's-like a woman choosing the stuff for her wedding-gown."

"Then he cannot be relied upon?" suggested Jim.

Giuseppe shrugged his shoulders.

"As much as ever he was," he said; "for, look you, senor, he is *not* to be trusted, I would not give a cigarette-paper for his word. As like as not, however, he will do nothing."

"There is *Algua Marbalo*?"

"He, senor, is a different matter. But he will not interfere with us, provided we do two things."

"What are they?"

"One is to keep a woman out of *Minorca*, and the other is to hang a woman."

Jim, startled, stared at Giuseppe, who was rubbing his chin meditatively.

"The woman to be kept out, senor, is *Lucia di Valo*."

"How can I keep her from going home?"

"Then she is yet alive?"

"Yes, and rapidly recovering."

"You must talk to her, senor. She will listen to you."

"Perhaps not. Now as to the woman who is to be hanged?"

"It is the tall, bony, old *senorita*."

"Miss Dibble?"

"That's her name, I believe. *Algua Marbalo* lives in terror of both. He would order the execution of *Lucia di Valo* if he dared, but he will be satisfied with her exile. The other *senorita* must die, so he says."

"He is a fool!" exclaimed Jim, angrily.

"He says she hath the evil eye, and a hand that is as the hoof of a *toro*. He dreams of her by night. By day he goes abroad with an escort. He dreads her coming."

Jim laughed, in spite of the undoubted gravity of the information. But he was resolved to ignore the request.

"I cannot exile the one or hang the other," he said.

"Then it all depends upon the governor," said Giuseppe. "If Marbalo can spur him on, there may be more trouble. If not, then you will be able to live on here in peace. I could," he added, dreamily, "at your bidding, return to Minorca and put a knife between his ribs—the ribs of Alguia Marbalo, I mean."

"No, no!"

"Or, senor, I could assure the tyrant that the bony senorita is dead, and I could take Lucia di Valo back with me."

Jim saw his purpose. He might take Lucia with him, but she would never reach the island of Minorca.

"There must be no bloodshed on my account," he said, briefly.

"I am no lover of it," said Giuseppe, simply; "it is for the senor I would do it. I owe him so much."

"I would rather not be paid in that coin," said Jim, and they walked on for a time in silence.

"Is the senor angry with me?" asked Giuseppe.

"No. You mean well, but the ways of your people are not the ways of mine. There are other ways in which you can help me."

The letters, which had been carried on, were still in the bags when Jim entered the castle. The breaking of the seals, and arrangement for sorting, were left for him to see to. Nobody thought at first of even informing Mr. Farrell that the mails had arrived.

It was so long since they had heard from home that the boys were more than usually eager to get their letters. The sorting was at once begun, and in a quarter of an hour, all helping, it was done.

Among the ordinary matter there were a lot of letters posted at Gibraltar by the youngsters who had been sent home. Mainly, they expressed regret at having been weak enough, as they put it, "to run away" from their comrades. There were many good wishes expressed, and all hoped that they would hear at times how those left on the island were getting on.

With the mass of correspondence we need not concern ourselves. It was not of a nature to interfere with the life on the island. But there were two letters, one received by Mr. Farrell and the other by Miss Elegantine, we must refer to.

Mr. Farrell's letter was from the agent, and it referred to rumours which had reached him of trouble on the island, and asking for particulars.

"It is to be hoped," the missive went on, "that you have not laid yourself open to any charge of a criminal nature, and, in any case, I shall be glad if you will write exonerating me from any share in the muddle I feel convinced you are in."

In his now helpless condition of mind and body, Mr. Farrell, alarmed, sent for Jim, who said that the best reply to the agent would be to send for more stores, and ask him to see they were duly shipped.

"You might send a letter, of course," advised Jim, "just to thank him for his interest in our affairs, and exonerating him from all blame."

"Suppose the parents of the boys who have gone home make a disturbance?" said Mr. Farrell, dismally.

"I feel convinced that from the majority we shall hear nothing," answered Jim; "the boys are not going home to grumble. At the worst, their friends will write to you first, and, if necessary, you will have to refund some of the money paid."

"I am getting very poor," groaned Mr. Farrell.

"You need not be rich to live on here for a time," said Jim. "Now, if you could get out and about and select a spot for your future home, I shall be glad. We must get all the house-building over as speedily as possible."

Mr. Farrell promised to do that on the morrow, and he told Jim that he must rely upon his help right through. Jim promised to do as much as he could for him, and left the presence of his late schoolmaster feeling in a strange way very much like the man who has been talking to a boy. In the matter of pluck and general manly bearing they had certainly changed places.

Miss Elegantine's letter was of a disquieting nature. It came from a solicitor who had been a friend of the father of Oscar Dibble. Its contents were as follows:

"197, Blackfriars, London, E.C.

"*Re* Oscar Dibble, Orphan.

"MADAM,—It has come to my knowledge that for some years past, while ostensibly acting merely as trustee of the estate of the late Septimus Dibble, for the benefit of the above referred to Oscar Dibble, his son, you have been transferring securities so that they now stand in your name alone. Moreover, it appears that the said Oscar Dibble has been reared in ignorance of his being heir to a very good property. From this we gather that you have some design of appropriating the said fortune for your own use and benefit. We therefore request you to at once return to England to meet a charge of misappropriation, or to give us power of attorney to re-transfer the said property to the heir, and give your undertaking not to further interfere with its disposal in any way whatever.—I am, Madam, your obedient servant, "THOMAS DANEURY."

The consternation of Miss Elegantine cannot be described. This was a matter that had troubled her conscience when camping on the rocks, and she was half in a mind to make confession of her deeds. But on returning to the castle, where she was once more in safety, she changed her mind.

Now she had to do something. That lawyer was not to be trifled with. So she sent for Dibble, and told him that she had been a very unkind aunt—which he had known long before—and that he was possessed of a large property—which staggered him, because he never knew he had any—and then she asked him what he would do.

"Well, auntie," said Dibble, "I don't want to do anything. I suppose you haven't the money about you?"

"Bless the boy, no!" exclaimed Miss Elegantine, "it is all in the funds."

"Oh," said Dibble, disappointed. He had a pile of ready cash in his mind's eye.

"If I had, it would not be any use to you here," said his aunt.

"How much is it?" asked Dibble.

"Close upon a thousand a year."

"Whew!"

This was something inconceivably vast to Dibble. He could hardly realise it.

"But you cannot have all your income now," said Miss Elegantine. "By the will of your father two hundred per annum is to be spent upon you. The rest is to accumulate until you are twenty-one. Then you come into it all."

"Who gets it if I die?" asked Dibble.

"Well," coughed his aunt; "ahem! It would come to me."

"Oh, indeed!" said Dibble. "Then that is why you sent me on here."

Miss Elegantine sat with a frozen look on her face. Dibble regarded her with a curious sternness on his own. It was so much at variance with his customary expression.

"What you intended," he said, slowly, "hasn't come off. Instead of being killed by the climate—I used to be a seedy sort of chap—it has done me good. And the life here is making something of a man of me. Therefore I don't feel inclined to say so much as I should otherwise have done. Have you any money of your own, aunt?"

"I had, when your father died," she answered, "enough to live on. But I was deluded with the promise of a fortune by a rascal of a bucket-shop keeper—as a sham stockbroker is rightly named—and was robbed of every farthing."

The face of Dibble softened.

"All right," he said; "I have nothing more to say. You sha'n't starve. How can I get at my money?"

She showed him the lawyer's letter, and finally it was decided that they both should write to the professional man, place everything in his hands, and leave the future conducting of Dibble's affairs to him.

"You shall have fifty pounds a year at present," said Dibble to his aunt, "and I will have some things I want sent out here. Where will you live, aunt?"

"Considering all things," she replied, "I will remain here. I think I can come to some arrangement with the Farrells."

Dibble was agreeable, and he promised his aunt that he would never mention his private affairs to anyone on the island, beyond stating the fact that he was richer than he thought.

That evening Dibble was busy writing to "his solicitor," informing him of the arrangement he

desired to be made for his aunt, and expressing his entire satisfaction with the life he was leading.

Finally he made out a list of things he wanted sent on, and among them were two Winchester repeating-rifles, one for Jim and the other for Morse.

With a prudence one would hardly have given him credit for, he did not say they were boys, but referred to them as "the two managers of everything on the island," leaving the lawyer to infer, as he naturally would do, that they were men.

There were other things in the list, mainly for amusement, and Dibble, true to his word, said nothing that night, nor for many days, on the subject of his change of fortune.

The boys were busy that night, writing home, with the main object of convincing all whom it might concern that they were very happy, and wished to remain. They also referred to possible rumours that might reach England, and asked their friends to pay no heed to them.

Giuseppe was going to act as the medium for conveying letters to Minorca in his boat. A double object would be attained by his so doing. The mails would go quicker, and he would be able to get warning of anything like a movement against the island boys.

Finally, all who desired to receive anything from home were to ask to have it sent to Minorca. Dibble had to open his letter to make this addition, for it was a late thought of Jim's.

Morse asked him why Minorca, when there were plenty of small trading-boats that would have brought them what they required.

"My idea," said Jim, "is to isolate this place as much as possible from the world. We want no strangers here to see what we are doing or how we are living."

"You are right, Jim," assented Morse.

"There is such a list of boundless possibles on this island," said Jim, "such as we may never find again while we live, that I don't feel disposed to be ousted from it. Two years here will be worth twenty years of ordinary life. There is the secret of the castle tower to get at. Now, you can put your ingenious head to work to find out a way to open those closed doors. There is the 'Cagliula' wreck, and the 'Orsini' is lying on the shore. Both are ours by right of having found them, and much may be done with the materials. Then there is the Dead City, that wants a thorough overhauling, and the woods and the caves—why, Morse, there is the work of a lifetime before us."

"There is," said Morse, drawing in a deep breath; "possibly I may discover some new chemical."

"Don't let it be an explosive one, then," interposed Jim, laughing. "By the way—your laboratory.

Where will you have it? It can't be in the Long House, I suppose?"

"It will still be in the castle," said Morse, quietly. "I shall not be disturbed there. It is an especially good place for night-work."

"Depends on the nerves of the worker," said Jim.

"Workers in my line," replied Morse, "have no business with nerves."

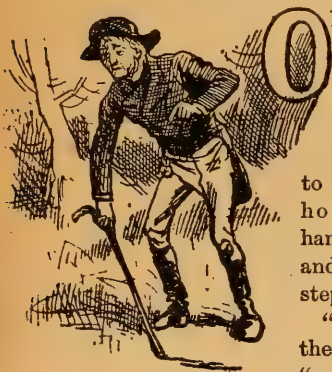
Among the other letters prepared that night was one written by Mrs. Farrell, and dictated by her husband. It was to the agent, explaining what stores were wanted, and bidding him not worry about the island or its people. An order was given on Mr. Farrell's banker for the necessary funds to pay for the goods.

Mr. Farrell seemed inclined to be niggardly in ordering, but his wife, without saying anything to him, made additions to the quantities, so that a very liberal supply might be looked for.

Early on the morning of the morrow Giuseppe started with the mail-bag for Minorca. Jim left him to say what he pleased to Don Algua Marballo. Personally he vouchsafed no reply to his extraordinary demands.

CHAPTER CLXXXIII.

MR. FARRELL CHOOSES A HOME.—ROMEO STARTS A PIGGERY.



On the fourth day Mr. Farrell came down from his room, and, accompanied by Mrs. Farrell, went out

to choose a spot for a home. He had a hankering for the chine, and they bent their steps in that direction.

"It will be shady in the summer," he said, "and it is, of course,

warm in the winter. It is also close to the farm."

"But it is a long way from the boys," urged his wife.

"I have had enough of the boys," he answered, snappishly.

So to the chine they went, and there he resolved to have his house erected. He stayed long enough to select the precise spot, and with his walking-stick to map out a ground-plan.

"It ought to be two storeys high," he said, "with an attic for a servant."

"What servant?" inquired Mrs. Farrell.

"I suppose we can get one," he muttered.

"I really cannot say where from," rejoined his wife.

On the way back she ventured to point out that his ground-plan was on rather a large scale for three people. He said he did not want to live in a cow-shed.

"But reflect," urged Mrs. Farrell: "the boys, when building it, will have to come over here every morning and return at night."

He did not care. There he wanted his house, and there he would have it. As for a servant, he supposed two of the negroes at least would accompany him. Mrs. Farrell said she was not sure. Practically, their old engagement had terminated. They would do as they pleased.

On their return, Romeo, as likely to be the most useful of the trio, was sent for. On the proposal being laid before him he expressed the utmost astonishment.

"Marse Farrell," he said, "me boun' to stop wif de boys. Anyway," he added, convincingly, "me goin' to do it!"

Hamlet, the next consulted, declared that he could not part from his beloved son, and Macbeth was sure that unless he was with Romeo he would pine away. In short, the negroes were not to be had for money. Love was out of the question.

"Confound the lot of you!" snarled Mr. Farrell, as he dismissed them.

"I had a strange proposal made to me this morning," said Mrs. Farrell. "It came from Miss Dibble. She wishes to live with us."

"Will she make herself useful?" demanded Mr. Farrell.

"She wishes to do so."

"Then let her come, and Chorker shall be odd man. I can keep him in order."

Thus was the future household constituted, and when Jim heard of the proposed site he only mildly demurred. In his heart he did not think that Silver Bay would be used as a landing-place for a foe again. Even if they ventured to come to the island it would be deemed unlucky.

"I have mapped out the size of the house required, Gordon," said Mr. Farrell. "It must be of wood, of course?"

"We have no means of conveying stone thither, sir," said Jim.

"Well, you will see to it as soon as you can, Gordon."

Gordon sent Sleery over in the morning, and on his return received his report. Mr. Farrell wanted a house nearly as big as the Long House in the wood.

"Build one that is suitable," said Jim, "and if he interferes with you, refer him to me."

Mr. Farrell did interfere—it would not have been

him if he had not—and he was referred to Jim. But he did not complain to that astute young leader, and the house was to be constructed sufficiently commodious, if of necessity rough and ready.

The timber was cut on the high land above, and rolled down and divided into logs.

A second saw-pit was constructed, and with a cross-cut saw the logs were divided.

The soil of the chine was rich. With a fair amount of labour a portion of the land by the house could be levelled and turned into a garden. This was the work Chorker was set to do.

He did not demur to the post for which he had been selected. It would have been useless if he had done so, but in his heart he wanted to get away from the boys, in whose company he felt far from happy.

So the work went on all round, and the house-building progressed rapidly.

All this time Jim had seen nothing of Lucia di Valo, and Giuseppe had not returned again from Minorca. He was expected every day.

One morning, Romeo, who had been granted a few hours off duty, which he spent prowling in the wood, came home in a very excited condition. Jim was helping with the thatching of the Long House.

"Marse Gordon," said Romeo, breathless and wild-eyed, "'fore you put de stockade, make him bigger at de back."

"Why?" asked Jim, pausing in his labours and looking down upon the excited face below.

"Me want room for 'bout half-a-dozen pig-sties, Marse Gordon."

"Wild pigs won't live in them, Romeo."

"Marse Gordon, you bet dey be tame 'nuff here. Me found seberal litters 'bout de wood. What to stop me bringing de lilly ones home in a sack?"

"Nothing, if their parents don't object."

"De moders," said Romeo, with a cunning leer, "keep de ole boar out ob de way, which he willing to do, not being fond ob de trubble ob bringing up a fambly. Den de moder boun' to go out to feed. Me see her. Now, when she go, dis chile walk in and take de lilly ones. See dat?"

Jim saw it and approved. There was unlimited feed for pigs around, and having fresh pork to hand, as it were, would certainly be desirable.

"Put up what sties you want," he said.

Romeo gave his spare time to the work, and was moreover helped by his father and grandfather, on whom the idea of pig-keeping acted like a charm. Harac, Maravello, Changeling, and others assisted, so that in three days half a dozen strong sties were ready, and Romeo went forth in search of sucking-pigs.

He was gone about two hours, and brought back with him half a dozen grunting and squealing things

in a sack. Macbeth and Hamlet, in expectation of the arrival of the little strangers, had some vegetable swill ready in the troughs.

"Dere five more in de litter," exclaimed Romeo, showing all his teeth; "no ole woman pig able to count. She tink de lilly pigs hab lorser flesh, and not see dat dey short."

"She may be consoled by having some left," remarked Terry, who was leaning over the side of the sty watching the new arrivals rubbing their noses in the swill. They took to it as ducks take to water.

"Take de res' to-morrow," said Romeo.

"I give you the tip," returned Terry, impressively, "don't. Pigs wild or tame are two doors at least off being fools. That old sow will be on the lookout for you."

But Romeo was not to be dissuaded. He was bent on getting the rest of the litter. The thirst of the successful hunter was upon him. So on the morrow, with his sack upon his shoulder, he started off gaily. As his father promised to do his work, he was able to leave the castle early, and he took his breakfast with him, eating it as he went along.

In the ordinary course he ought to have been back by ten o'clock, but twelve arrived and he was still absent. The inference was that something had gone wrong with the sucking-pig snatching.

Terry spoke to Morse about it, and suggested that a party should go in search of him. Morse said that many could not be spared, but volunteered to go with Terry. They took their rifles and went off to the wood.

"It is in a direct line north," said Terry; "Romeo told me so. The litter is in an old hollow tree, one of those giant oaks we noticed when we passed through."

They had a fairly clear trail, moreover, to guide them, for just there the moss grew in winter, and the feet of Romeo were calculated to make very decided impression upon it.

They went forward briskly until they suddenly came upon an enormous old sow squatting on her haunches, with her eyes fixed upon the trunk of a vast oak-tree.

A glance at the trunk showed that it was hollow. There was a hole in it, anyhow, through which the sow could pass.

The air of the animal, if the attitude was still, was peculiarly vicious.

"That's the sow," said Terry. "Romeo has got away with the young ones, and she is angrily contemplating her despoiled home."

"She is not looking at an empty home," said Morse. "See that?"

"A human hand, black as the shades of night, was thrust out of the hollow, and in the closed fingers

there gleamed a knife. It was a weapon Romeo was known to be in possession of.

They both realised what had happened, and Terry, leaning against a tree, laughed quietly. Morse contented himself with smiling.

"Listen!" he said.

They drew up a little nearer, and keeping out of sight of the infuriated animal, listened intently. The voice of Romeo, somewhat muffled, reached their ears.

"Now you ole fool," he was saying, "what you mean by keepin' me here 'bout a day and aarf? Stan' back and gib me a chance for a run, and on de word ob a royal black genelman me leab de lilly pigs behind me."

The sow grunted viciously, thrusting forward her ears. Her tail, corkscrewed near the ground, twirled furiously.

"Jes step to de lef," urged Romeo, "'bout twenty yards. See here—de empty sack." He thrust it forward like a conjurer, to show there was nothing in it. "Now dere no wish for me to break de word ob honour. You got de bess part of my colour drawers now, and you eat him. What more do you want? Cuss you! Clear off!"

But the sow was bent on keeping him there. She dared not venture in with the glitter of that knife in her eyes, but she did not mean to go away. What she wanted was a fair go at Romeo in the open.

He, on his part, was not inclined to risk an encounter that would be odds on the infuriated animal.

"I suppose we had better end it," whispered Terry.

Morse nodded his head.

"I'll fire first," said Terry; "if I miss you will have your shot to settle her. It seems a pity, but it must be done."

He took careful aim and pulled the trigger. The bullet struck the sow in the head, and she rolled over dead.

"Hide!" whispered Terry.

Morse looked at him in astonishment, but Terry drew him behind the tree.

"She is done for," murmured Morse.

"Yes, I know," said Terry; "but let us hear what Romeo has to say to it."

Romeo no doubt was staggered, but in a few moments he thrust his head out and looked at the sow. She certainly was dead. Shut inside the tree, the report of the rifle had reached him in a muffled form. He hardly recognised it as originating in powder and shot.

The bullet had gone clean through the head of the animal, and there was very little blood. Romeo looked round him, and, seeing nobody, was more astonished than ever.

"Dis out ob de reglar course ob tings!" he gasped. "What happen to de creature?"

This was a matter he was more inclined to work out when he got home, than remain there to do it. So he stepped back, popped the rest of the young pigs into the sack, and started for home. By working quietly round the trunk of the tree Terry and Morse succeeded in keeping out of sight, and Romeo disappeared on his way without being conscious of the identity of the authors of his timely rescue.

"Now, I wonder what yarn he will spin when he gets home?" said Morse.

"We will manage to hear it repeated, anyway," returned Terry. "That pig will be useful."

"We had better put her into the hollow for the night, and fetch her in the morning," advised Morse.

This was done, and, shouldering their rifles, they started for home. When they reached the workers at the Long House, they learnt that Romeo had been seen to go by without a word. He had simply deposited his prizes in the sty and gone on.

CHAPTER CLXXXIV.

ROMEO'S VERACITY.—LUCIA DI VALO MAKES A MOVE.



AS THE two rescuers of Romeo entered the hall, Macbeth was saying, "It de mose 'stronary story eber me heard."

All three niggers were busy clearing the table. Dinner was over, and apparently Terry and Morse had not been missed.

"What is extraordinary?" asked Terry.

"Dis boy ob ours," said Macbeth, proudly.

"Strangle an ole sow and take de young."

"He alser lame de ole boar for life," added Hamlet.

"Indeed!" said Morse. "Where is the old sow?"

"Me go to de wood and cut her up to-morrow," replied Romeo.

"And the boar?"

"Oh! he jes' lame nuff to hop away. Me habin' no gun, he able to do it."

"You strangled a sow?" said Morse, meditatively.

"Was she ailing?"

"No, Marse Morse," said Romeo. "In de bes' ob healf."

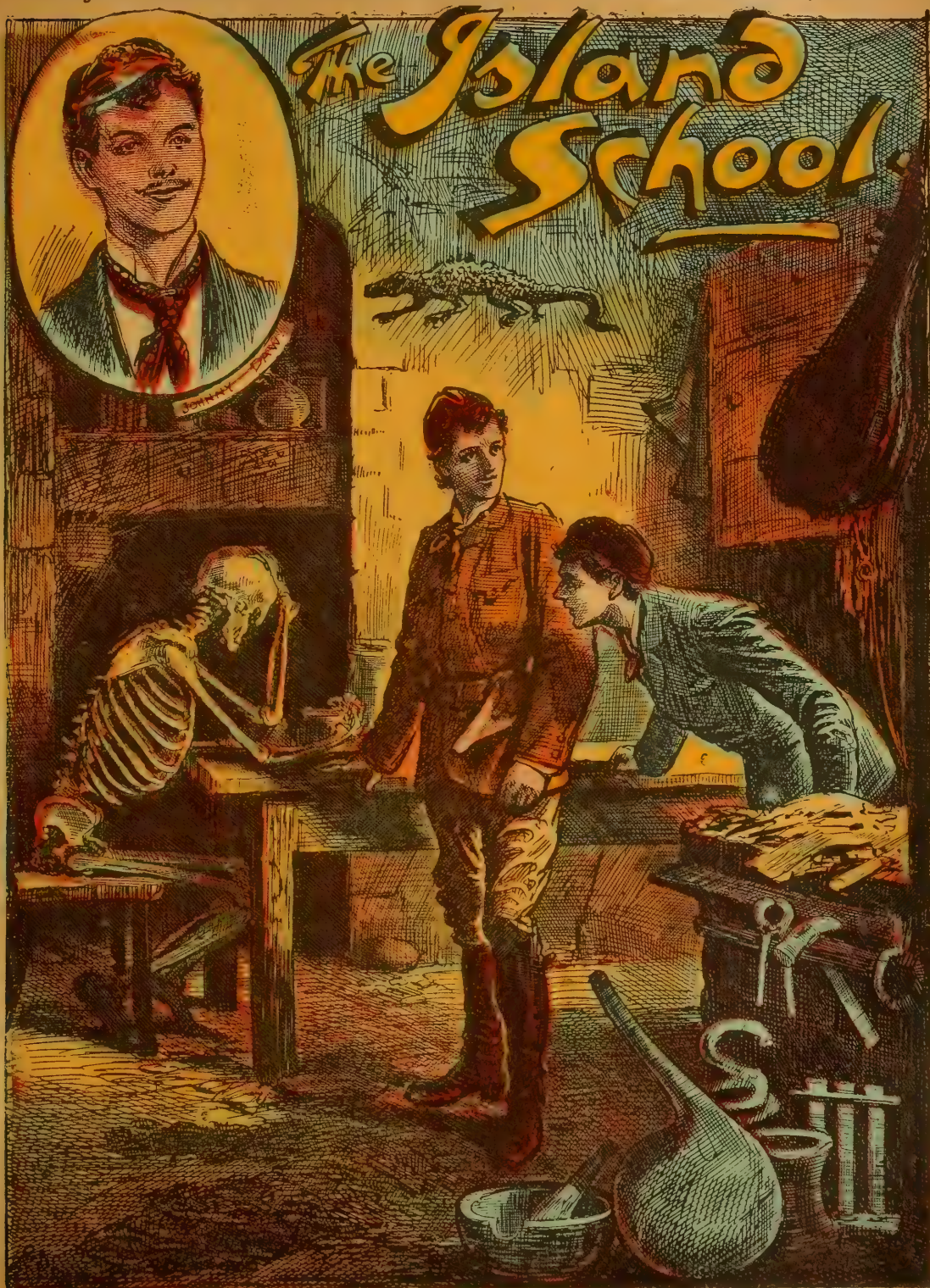
"The sow ought to have been strong."

"She wor all dat, Marse Morse. 'Bout de strongest me eber tackle."

"She took all de back ob him breeches at one bite," explained Hamlet, holding up the damaged article, which Romeo had changed for a more presentable garment.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



"Here is the workshop I have longed for and dreamt of. Here will I carry on my work, Jim, and who knows but one day I may complete what the man, who is now but yonder skeleton, began?"

"Then you went for her?" suggested Terry.

"Took her dis way, round de troat," said Romeo, squeezing up his hands. "All de life come out ob her ears."

"He got more strength den he born wif, sure," said Macbeth, as he retreated towards the courtyard, which now served as a kitchen.

Hamlet followed him, but Morse beckoned to Romeo to remain.

"I wish," he said, "that you would get us something to eat."

"Lor, Marse Morse, and you jess had dinner!"

"I have not had any dinner, nor Terry either. We have been out."

Romeo looked at them inquiringly, cast a glance at their rifles, and rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"You been out?" he said.

"Yes, in the wood."

"Gollysmash!"

"And we came across a sow keeping an eye on a tree. It was hollow, and there was somebody inside it."

Romeo gaped.

"We shot that sow," pursued Terry, "and then we let the man come out of the tree and go home. We stayed only to put the carcass away for the night, and then came along. So you see we have done a lot, and must be hungry."

"Marse Morse and Marse Terry," said Romeo, with the air of a man who means to make a clean breast of all his sins if there is nothing else to do, "did you see dat man in de tree?"

"No," replied Terry; "only a hand or so of him. But we heard him talking."

"Marse Morse and Marse Terry," said Romeo, "me not such a big liar as to say dat me *not* a liar. But for de sake ob de ole people, Hamlet my fader, and Macbef my grandfader, you let de marrer be as it am."

"Why?" asked Morse.

"For dere sakes," said Romeo. "Dey see at once dat me inherick de lyn' gif, and for bery shame dey not able to show derselbes mong you."

"Oh! that's it?" said Terry.

"Moreober, it am dere fault all roun'," pursued Romeo. "All trew life dey *neber swaller de trufe*. Dey litellally go hungry for lies, and out ob *filial defection* me jess make a liar ob 'self to please dem."

"I think," said Morse, "that you had better say no more, but get me something to eat."

"But you not make dem ashame ob demselbes, Marse Morse, will you?" pleaded Romeo.

"Not this time. But when next we find you in a hollow tree and an old sow waiting to make rags of you, she will be left to have her own sweet will. Hurry up, sharp!"

"You take de mose sensible way ob looking at de

ole men's fault me eber met," murmured Romeo, as he vanished on his errand.

"This ought to be a lesson to him," said Terry. "Romeo and the absolute truth have never been on the most intimate terms."

"The Ethiopian cannot change his skin," remarked Morse, sententially.

However, they decided not to expose the romantic Romeo, and the story of how he strangled a sow and brought home a litter of pigs became a family tradition.

The old sow's carcass was fetched home on the following morning.

Two days more followed, the weather continuing fine, but the wind gusty. The weatherwise said that a storm was brewing.

For once in a way they were right. The morning of the third day came, bringing with it a roaring wind with a fine snow driving before it. The boys came down to the hall later than usual, and gathered round the ample fire.

"Nap, in his prospectus," said Trimmer, "declared that on this favoured island neither the blinding snow nor the chill blasts of winter ever came."

"Do you quote him as a master of veracity?" inquired Rainstone.

"I don't," said Trimmer; "I merely mentioned the fact."

"It is only a temporary storm," said Dawson.

"Much you know about it," said Dibble.

"I learnt something about the weather at home," retorted Dawson, "which is more than you appear to have done. This storm may be over before the sun sets to-day, and the snow will melt in a few hours."

"We cannot work outside to-day," said Felton; "what shall we do?"

"I'll find you something to keep you from rusting," said Morse. "Well, Romeo, how do you find it outside?"

"It 'bout as cold as dey make de wedder," replied Romeo, who had just entered the hall with sundry things for breakfast.

"How do you manage your cooking?" inquired Dibble. "Can't do anything in the open?"

"What you take me for?" demanded Romeo. "Do you tink me got no inventrive brains? Now, s'pose you was a-cooking in de courtyard, Marse Dibble, and de snow begin to fall, what you do wif de cooking-stove, it ceterear?"

"Cover it up," replied Dibble.

"How you cook den?"

"I shouldn't cook at all."

"Den de Lor' hab marcy on a school dat you got to revide for. What me do now? While dat ole chunker Macbeth and him offspring Hamlet, to bof ob whom me am slightly related, was a-scratching

dere heads and wondering what dey do, dis chile ketch up de stove and run wif him to de shelter by de gates. Dere he am now doing ob de work as well as eber."

The listeners feigned being overcome with surprise to find so much sagacity in their service.

"I suppose," inquired Terry, serenely, "that the stove wasn't *quite* red-hot at the time you moved it."

"Now, Marse Terry," remonstrated Romeo, "what you tink me made ob? You might hab lighted de fire firse, but me do him affer I make de move, and dere where de intellicks ob a man like me come in useful. Dat p'ace make a berry snug kitchen now dat de ole people hab block up de portsullers wif some sacking."

"It is at all events highly convenient for getting in and out of the castle," remarked Dawson.

"Do you 'spec me to stop dere for eber?" asked Romeo, indignantly. "Bless me, Marse Dawson, you 'pear to got no more interlicks dan Marse Terry."

Romeo, having disposed upon the table the things he had brought in, vanished in search of a further supply. The men now appeared, and shortly after Eveline opened the door and looked into the hall.

Jim was standing by the fire mentally arranging something to kill the time during the day, but he caught her eye instantly. He could see by her face that something was wrong. She had a note in her hand which she gave to him.

"From *her*," she said; "she is gone."

"*Gone!*" echoed Jim; "not Lucia di Valo?"

"Yes. You are sorry, of course?"

"When did she go?" asked Jim, ignoring the question.

"The letter will explain," replied Eveline. "I don't know. She was up when I went to rest, and her bed hadn't been slept on."

Eveline backed out of the hall, and Jim followed her, closing the door. It was a gloomy passage beyond, but there was light enough for him to read the contents of the letter.

"You would like to know what is in here?" he said, as he broke it open.

"Not if it is *very* private," replied Eveline.

"Why are you so absurd?" asked Jim. "What could there be between a woman of two or three-and-twenty and myself that could be called private?"

"She told me she was only eighteen," said Eveline.

"Then all I can say is, that she is a remarkably fine young woman for her age," returned Jim. "Gone, is she? What a mad thing to do!"

He cast his eye over the letter, and then handed it to Eveline. It ran as follows:

"I leave you to-night, as I am out of place here. I am going away—no matter where; let me, ere I go make confession. I have been a fool—more than a fool. Out of

insane jealousy of a simple, pure-minded girl, all the misery and mischief of the past months has sprung. I alone am to blame. Gladly would I have remained here to live in peace, but I am not worthy. I go to—what matters where I say? I wish you well, all you brave young hearts. A blessing on the head of that sweet girl who has cared for me as if I had been her sister.

"Her sister? Impossible! The dove and the she-wolf are not friends. Farewell. Trouble not for me; do not even think of me. It were better for me to be forgotten. Once more, adieu!"

"If I had suspected this," said Eveline, "she should not have gone."

"She will never trouble us more," said Jim, sadly. "I have no doubt of what she has done. She put to sea last night, and there has been a gale blowing."

Eveline was startled. She had hardly thought as yet of the course Lucia had taken. She did not think of the sea.

"Would she be so rash, Jim?"

"She is bold to rashness," he answered; "if so, it is all over with her. Her boat is a mere cockle-shell. It assuredly could not live an hour in such a gale as was raging last night, and is raging now."

They could hear it, though shut in between thick walls. It roared like a huge cataract rushing down over projecting rocks.

"Perhaps she is still upon the island," suggested Eveline.

"You do not know her," replied Jim; "she has no sense of fear. And this, her letter, was a final adieu."

Eveline turned away with tears in her eyes, and moved slowly up the stairs.

"She was very beautiful," she murmured.

Jim caught the words, and in his heart was obliged to agree with them.

Had Lucia di Valo gone away under different circumstances he would have felt a sense of relief. But now that she had manifestly gone to her death, he felt all the sorrow for her that a heroic nature feels for a worthy foe who has come to an untimely end.

He stood for a minute or so thinking of her, and then with a sigh returned to the hall, where breakfast had already begun.

Outside the wind was not only howling, but increasing in violence, and the air was filled with a blinding snow.

"Nap's everlasting summer," was the sarcastic comment on the weather; but a day in the old castle was in store for them, and they prepared to make the best of it.

CHAPTER CLXXXV.

THE CLOSED ROOMS IN THE TOWER.



THERE is work for all of you," said Morse, later on. "The store of cartridges is getting low. I have the powder ready. You are not to handle it in the bulk, but fetch it out of the laboratory a few ounces at a time."

Here was work for half the boys. The rest were set to work casting bullets and making a crude kind of gunshot for shooting in the woods, by cutting some sheet-lead into strips, then into pellets, and finally rolling a few at a time between two pieces of sheet-iron.

By this process a very fair imitation of the ordinary gunshot was obtained.

For others there was some carpentering to do. Among the furniture several chairs and a table wanted repairing.

Chorker and Changeling set to work chopping small firewood, and Trueberry and Sleery helped the boys.

Martin was told by Morse to get his tools and be ready to go with him and Jim.

The latter had no idea of what was in the mind of Morse, and he was debating with himself how he should spend the day, when his friend joined him.

"Jim," he said, "I am thinking of trying to get into the closed chambers of the tower. Hitherto I have held off because there was more important work to do, but to-day there is nothing that calls for me or you."

"I gave them up," said Jim, "thinking they were sealed against us."

"So I have thought," replied Morse, "but the more I think of the matter, the more I am convinced that either there is a way into the rooms we know nothing of, or that the door can be opened."

"Well, it is your affair," said Jim. "I suppose we shall find a due allowance of cobwebs and some dust."

Martin was ready with his basket of tools, and Morse having given a final word of caution to the cartridge-makers concerning the care needed in handling the powder, they started for the tower.

On opening the door, the wind whirled in some snow and whisked up all the light materials of the cartridge-makers from the table.

"Whoop there!" shouted Terry, as he clutched at some sheets of paper on the way to the hearth; "now she blows! There ought to be a wreck or two on the island. I feel like a wrecker."

"If all on board a ship could be drowned," said Dibble, "without exactly dying——"

"Dry up!" cried Dawson, "I hate sneaking over the matter. If a ship came ashore, with all the crew and the captain and officers gone, *we should be glad of it!* The thing is perfectly clear. Drop your humbug."

"We have two vessels ashore already," said Dibble, faintly.

"We could do with a dozen," returned Dawson, composedly, "but I am not spiteful, and hope there will be no British wreck ashore."

This was considered rather selfish of him, but it was patriotic, in a sense, and the talk turned towards shipwrecks generally, and of lonely men cast on islands where they lived a life of comfort and joy, according to the narrators of the stories.

"I never quite believed in 'Robinson Crusoe'," said Dibble. "Twenty-seven years alone! He would have gone mad long before that."

"I never look too closely into probability in stories I like," said Terry. "How do you think ours would read in print? Dibble, with all brotherly love, allow me to brand you as an unqualified *ass*. Truth is stranger than fiction."

Jim and his companions did not stay to hear the foregoing. They had gone out and closed the door a few moments before Dibble expressed his unbelief in the perennial "Robinson Crusoe."

In the courtyard the snow was being whirled round and round like a whirlpool. By the walls it was gathering deep, while the centre of the open space was almost clear.

The elder negroes had shut themselves in by the gates, and made the place wonderfully snug. It was rather dark, as they had stopped up the portcullis with sacking.

Charley lay stretched at full length in a warm corner, and just raised his head as the trio passed through.

Cold days gave him a feeling of lassitude and a yearning to hibernate somewhere for a month or so.

"Want de gate open, Marse Gordon?" asked Macbeth.

"No, we are going on the ramparts," replied Jim.

"Golly, you find it berry cold up dere, sar."

It was wonderfully cold, considering the geographical position of the island.

A wind that rasped the flesh, and snow that beat fiercely into every crevice of the head and face, were no great allurements for staying there long. But Jim lingered a few moments, endeavouring to get a view of the sea.

What he expected to find there he could not say. He could not hope to see anything of Lucia di Valo, naturally. Giuseppe would hardly be at sea at such a

time, for he was weatherwise, and would have foreseen the storm.

But, in any case, there was nothing in sight. Thirty yards away from the castle the whole landscape was blotted out by the snow.

No doubt in that district it was the storm of the century.

Jim followed his friends into the tower, and they ascended to the landing, where the first closed door was found.

"There, Martin," said Morse, "we want it open. Can you do it?"

Martin looked at the door, tapped the metal with a hammer, and looked dubious.

"It is mighty tough stuff—a mixture of copper and iron, with something thrown in," he said. "I think it will tax the best of my files, if you want it cut."

"That is precisely what we wish," said Morse. "There are three of these doors, one above another, and all are closed. You see how peculiarly it is done."

"Can't say I do," replied Martin.

"They are fastened on the inside."

"Phew! All of 'em?"

"Yes."

"Then there must be a staircase hidden away somewhere."

"Where?"

Martin looked at the wall, cast a glance upward, scratched his head, and gave it up.

"My theory," said Morse, "is that on the other side we shall find an entire solution of the mystery."

Martin opened his basket, and selecting a long and strong file, again surveyed the door.

"I'll begin at the side here," he said.

It had a small hole, that may once have been used for a keyhole, to begin on, and he proceeded to work.

But the file made scarcely any impression on the metal, although he worked his hardest.

"Hang the stuff!" he growled, as he stopped and wiped the perspiration from his forehead with his arm, "what is it made of?"

"At this rate," said Morse, "it would take you a week to cut a hole big enough for us to creep through."

"Nearer a month," said Martin, bitterly. "I've never been so licked before in my life. Why, it is as bad as the toughest gun-metal."

"That shows," said Morse, "I was right in my original fear about blasting it. I could blow this door out of its sockets, but the wall outside would go first, and down must come the tower. Hang it! I don't like to be licked."

Jim, who was beating his hands together to take off the chill, leant against the wall and laughed.

"I can't help it," he said. "It is such a treat to see you beaten for once."

"Oh, it's a treat, is it?" muttered Morse.

"It is."

"I am not licked yet. Martin, leave your tools here. Don't wait. Jim, you may go, too. It is more comfortable by the fire."

"I haven't hurt your feelings, I hope, old fellow?" pleaded Jim.

"Not a bit. But I am going to work in my own way, and I wish to be alone. By the way, as you want an indoor job, why not go to the cave? You remember coming to the blank wall with a square stone sunk in the clay?"

"Yes, I remember," said Jim. "It was when we were hunting for you."

"Go and see what is behind that stone," said Morse, "and be back in time for an evening chat with me. Possibly I may have something to tell you. Martin had better go with you."

"I shall be glad of him," said Jim. "Good-bye, old fellow. I wish you luck with the job of cutting a slice out of that door."

"Thanks. Luck to you down below."

"He will never do anything with that stuff," said Martin, as they descended the stone stairs to the ramparts. "It's been worked in a dozen cross-grains, and hammered until it's too hard for anything."

"He has something in his head that he would not tell us of," said Jim, smiling. "I know his style of doing things. Asking for your tools was a mere bit of pleasant humbug."

Below, they found the kitchen occupied by Romeo alone. His eyes opened as he saw them.

"Marse Gordon," he said, "nuffin up outside, me hope?"

"Nothing," said Jim. "By the way, you might get us something to take with us. Martin and myself are going to the cave."

"Dere nuffin to do, Marse Gordon. Let me go, too."

"As you like," said Jim. "Be as quick as you can. You will find us in the laboratory."

CHAPTER CLXXXVI.

THE DISCOVERY IN THE CAVE.



IN the hall the work of cartridge-making was briskly proceeding. Jim passed through without speaking to any of his chums, but Martin lingered for a moment to watch the bullet-casting and shot-making.

He gave the workers a few hints that would materi-

ally lessen their labours. Terry asked him what was up.

"I see Jim going that way with his business look upon his face," he said.

"Going below for a change of air," replied Martin, smiling.

Chorker was standing close by, listening, but without appearing to do so.

"What's the good of going below?" asked Terry.

"Gordon thinks there is something to be found," said Martin.

He went on to the laboratory, and Terry resumed his work. Chorker sat down and kept a watchful eye on the open door of the laboratory.

Presently Romeo came along, with a small basket filled with food in his hand. Chorker became more and more interested.

After waiting for a time and hearing nothing from the laboratory, he cautiously entered. The place was empty, and the trap-door thrown back.

Stooping over the opening, he could hear voices below, and after a moment's hesitation he decided to follow.

"They wouldn't mind my playing spy for them, and I don't see why I shouldn't do it for myself."

But when he got to the bottom of the steps he could neither hear voices nor see the light, which one of them doubtless was carrying. They would never have ventured down without it.

He had not the pluck to go on, and one can hardly wonder at it, when his previous experiences are considered. So he went back to the hall and awaited their return.

"Summat may drop to help me, if I keeps my ears open," he thought. "Anyways, they won't bring much up without my knowing it. Arter what I suffered in that hole I feel I'm entitled to a bit of whatever's found."

His mind ran on bags of gold, but it was something very different. Martin and Jim were destined to discover in the cave below.

Jim had seen to a due provision for light, and the way to the blind passage was easily traced. In something under the quarter of an hour they were standing before the square stone imbedded in the clay.

"When I was last here," said Jim, "a lot of foul air came out on removing the stone. I have brought a piece of candle to test the air with."

"Marse Gordon," said Romeo, "you let me go in first. Nigger lib where white man go dead bang, Chinaman lib where black man go off."

The stone was pulled out, and they stood aside for a moment or so. Then Jim lighted a match and ignited his piece of candle.

He thrust it through the opening, and it burnt brightly.

"Nuffin in dere to kill a nigger," said Romeo, and without any hesitation he thrust his head into the hole.

Then half his body disappeared, and he stopped.

"Marse Gordon!" he cried, in a muffled voice.

"What is it?" asked Jim.

"Can you shove de lantern t'rough, under me?"

"I am afraid not. You must come back."

So Romeo came back to receive the lantern, which he would be able to thrust ahead of him.

"Found anything?" inquired Martin.

"Dere a curus bumming sound t'rough dere," replied Romeo, "and it seem to be berry low down. It uncommon, to be sure."

He projected himself through again, and, as before, came to a halt. Then he again returned.

"Dere nuffin but a big, deep hole on de oder side," he declared. "It spread out right away, so dat you not able to see 'cross it."

"But you can see the bottom?" suggested Jim.

Romeo shook his head.

"See nuffin," he said, "but jess hear de bumming, like me don't know what."

"I had better have a look through," said Jim.

"For de lub ob all dat am beauful and true!" cried Romeo, "don't go too far."

"I will be careful," said Jim. "Never mind the light. I have some of Morse's patent flammers, made in Fermentera, and can see what sort of place it is."

He crept into the opening, and when all but his legs from the knees downwards had vanished, he halted.

Romeo put down the lantern and endeavoured to see the cavern beyond. Jim had lighted one of Morse's flaming matches, and was waving it to and fro.

But he so nearly blocked up the opening that neither Martin nor Romeo could see anything.

"Spect it a sort ob well," said Romeo.

"Couldn't you see the bottom?" asked Martin.

"Nuffin but jess as black"—Romeo paused for something that was sufficiently dark for comparison—"as dark as de face ob my grandfader."

Martin laughed. If anything, Romeo was darker than either of his progenitors, but there was not much to choose between them.

"Look to the wick of the lamp," said the blacksmith; "it wants trimming."

Romeo threw open the lamp, snuffed the wick with his fingers, and closed it again.

"Marse Gordon," he said, "will you—for de Lor', where am he?"

It was a startling question, for there was nothing to be seen but the square black hole.

Romeo staggered back against the wall, and Martin for the moment lost his breath.

"He has fallen through!" he gasped

"Dis about as mournful a ting as eber me met wif. Marse Gordon! Marse Gordon!"

He thrust his face into the opening and shouted in his loudest. In his excitement he dropped the lantern, and it went out.

All was pitchy dark now, but Martin was provided with a box of matches, and soon had the lamp going again.

"I'll see what has become of him," he said.

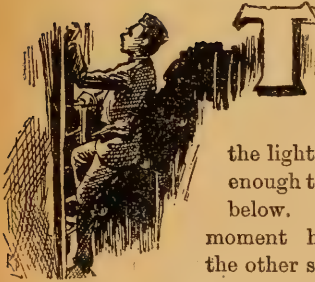
"Lemme chuck myself down affer him," moaned Romeo.

"That would be folly," said Martin. "No, I am going." He pushed Romeo aside and thrust his broad shoulders into the opening. He was so broadly built that the fit was a fairly tight one, and the inevitable bit of squeezing that had to be done gave him a very disagreeable sensation.

But pushing his way on, with the lantern before him, he persevered, leaving the return for future consideration, until his head was out the other side and he could peer into the darkness below.

CHAPTER CLXXXVII.

WHITHER DOES IT GO?



THE opening beyond was too wide, as Romeo for once truly reported, to see across, nor was the light of the lantern strong enough to penetrate the depths below. Martin saw this the moment his head emerged on the other side.

"Gone, poor fellow!" he muttered. "I can only call him. It will do no harm."

Raising his voice, he shouted:

"Gordon! Gordon!"

"Here!" was the prompt answer from somewhere below.

"Alive!" shouted Martin. "Romeo, I can hear him!"

But Romeo could not catch what he said. Martin was much too tight a fit for the opening for sounds to travel through freely. Romeo heard something, and believing it to be evil news, set up a dismal howling.

But that could only be imperfectly heard by Martin, who devoted his attention naturally to Jim.

"You've fallen down there," he said.

"Nothing of the sort," was the reply. "Pass your hand along the wall and you will find an iron ladder fixed close to it. It runs up on the left side. Lay

hold of the rungs and pull yourself through. Here, I'll show you a light."

A match flared, and by its glow Martin saw Jim about sixty feet below, standing on level ground.

"What am I to do with the lantern?" he asked.

"Blow it out and carry it in your teeth," answered Jim. "You can feel the ladder."

Martin promptly obeyed. The light vanished, and with the ring of the lantern in his teeth, he stretched out his hands for the iron ladder.

It was on the left side of the opening, and the top of it was somewhere overhead.

With an effort that taxed even his muscular arms, he pulled himself clear and got his feet upon one of the lower rounds. At that moment Romeo's voice was heard.

"Whar de light?" he screamed.

Martin, having the lantern in his teeth, could not answer him. Jim probably did not hear the negro, for he was silent too.

"Here, what dis?" yelled Romeo, "you gone, too. Lor' ha' massy on you! Down dere bof ob you, and dis chile lef in the darkness. Help, dere! Help!"

The row he made was simply fearful, and there was no cessation in it. Martin, holding on by one hand to the ladder, removed the lantern from his teeth and endeavoured to reassure him. But his voice was lost in the multitudinous echoes raised by the distracted nigger.

Presently his voice began to die away, and Martin rightly guessed that he was gone, seeking safety on his own account, or for help for his friends. Most likely the latter.

"Can't be helped," thought the blacksmith, as he resumed his way; "an extra scare won't hurt anybody. Are you there, Gordon?"

"Yes," replied Jim, as he lighted another match.

Every sound they made raised a series of echoes, but as Jim spoke quietly, and Martin low and clear, the noise was nothing compared to that created by Romeo.

A few moments and they were side by side. Martin relighted the lamp.

"The nigger's cut it," he said.

Jim laughed.

"He thinks we are done for," he said, "poor old Romeo! I suppose he will find his way back. I had no idea of alarming you," he added; "on finding the ladder I picked off a piece of earth and threw it down. The sound told me there was no great depth to travel and no water at the bottom. So I thought I would run down and up again, before telling you what I had found."

Martin held the lamp high, and then looked about them. They were in a cavern with a rugged roof, and without symmetry, showing it was not the work of

man. It might have been a hundred feet in diameter, but no more.

Scattered about on the floor were a lot of fluffy pieces of rag. Jim, turning a portion over with his foot, saw something glitter.

"It is not a diamond," said Martin; "I don't know what it is."

Neither did Jim. He put the stone in his pocket and was about to look for more, when an exclamation from Martin distracted his attention.

"There is a way out yonder," the blacksmith said.

Jim could see it, too—the mouth of a passage not more than seven feet high.

They crossed over to it, and discovered that it opened upon a flight of descending steps.

And out from the depths below there came a roaring sound, rising and falling, swelling and dying away in a sad yet sweet way, as if the wind were sweeping across the strings of some gigantic Æolian harp.

"What is it?" asked Martin, in a hushed way.

"It is difficult to say," answered Jim, "with a certainty. It may be either the wind or the sea. One thing we may rely upon: there is an opening of some sort below."

"Will you venture down?"

"I think so. The lamp is good for three hours more. By the way, I wonder if Romeo has left the basket of provisions behind him? It may come in useful."

"I will see."

"No, Martin, I am the nimblest. Hold the lantern so as to give me as much light as possible."

Jim skipped up the ladder, crept through the opening, and speedily returned with the basket, which the alarmed Romeo had left behind him. He thrust his arm through the handles and rejoined Martin, who had been admiring his activity. Jim handed him the basket, and taking the lantern, led the way down the steps.

For a short way down they descended direct. Then they came to a landing about twelve feet square, and the further steps diverged at an acute angle. Still further down they diverged again. Jim stopped here and meditated for a few moments.

"Now," he said, "we shall be going towards the sea. Listen, we can hear the roaring much plainer."

"But it's a long way down still," Martin ventured to say.

"Yes, it must be," said Jim. "Now as to our exact position. Where would you say we are? What is overhead?"

"I haven't any brains for calculating that sort of thing," said Martin.

"We started towards the chine," said Jim, checking the facts off his fingers. "Then we bore to the left, which would take us towards the wood. On

reaching these steps, we descended in the same direction, and then took two turns at an acute angle. That brings us back on the other tack. For the last few minutes we have been moving towards the castle."

"I am willing to believe it, if you say so," said Martin; "it is a thing I can't work out."

"What I am trying to calculate is this," said Jim. "The termination of our journey appears to be the sea, doesn't it?"

"Yes. If it is the sea we hear."

"I have no doubt of it. Well, if the sea is there, it must find a way in through some cave."

"Unless it comes up through the ground into a cave like a spring," suggested Martin.

"In that case," said Jim, "there would be no waves, no sinking and rising, none of the swishing we can hear so plainly. These are things that come from the upward rushing of waves and the retreat of the waters. Now can you call to mind any cave on what I may call *our* side of the island where the sea could enter in a proportion to cause the sounds we hear?"

"I don't know of any cave, worth the name, near the sea anywhere," said Martin.

"No more do I," rejoined Jim. "There is a cave of a sort I know of near where the 'Orsini' is, or was, lying, but in the summer the sea did not reach it. More than that, we knew its full extent. It is because we know of no caves that I want to know where we are going."

"It's a hard nut to crack," said Martin.

"And will not, I fear, be cracked to-day," said Jim. "For the present we can do nothing but proceed."

As the steps were now steeper than they had been heretofore, Jim resumed their downward journey with the utmost caution. For all he knew a false step might precipitate him to the bottom of some tremendous depth from out of which the sounds that were so like the roaring of the sea were derived.

It was some time ere they came to another landing—Jim counted over two hundred steps—and when they did, they found it was of considerable proportions, being fully sixty feet by forty.

On the opposite side there was a continuation of the steps. The flooring was covered with a rich golden-coloured sand, of the same nature as that on the inner shore of the lagoon.

Jim again stopped and mused for a while, Martin standing patiently awaiting the issue of his reflections.

"Martin," he said, at length, "we are now as near as possible on a level with the sea."

Martin started. He did not think they were so far down as that.

Jim walked over to the opening where the continuation of the steps was to be seen, and stooping down, listened intently

"The same sound," he said, "and it seems as far off as ever, but it's from water it comes. Where and what is it?"

Martin shook his head. Geological problems were not in his line of thought.

"If you are right about our position," he said, "it is a greater mystery than ever."

"I am right, I cannot but believe," said Jim. "However, time is getting on, and as I am getting hungry, you may dive into that basket. I can eat in the dark, and I daresay you will not object. After we have divided the provender, you may put out the light. It will save the oil."

"Then you mean to go lower down?" said Martin, as he opened the basket.

"Assuredly," returned Jim; "we can give another hour to exploration before we think of returning."

"As you like, sir," said Martin. "Of course you don't believe in giants living in caves, such as we read of in story-books?"

"I will believe in them when I see them," replied Jim, smiling. "I do not say there are no such things."

"I remember," said Martin, "when I was a boy—Why, here is a bottle of brandy-and-water. Uncommonly thoughtful of Romeo. Where did he get it from?"

"Giuseppo brought a supply with him. Possibly he may have given the negroes a bottle for themselves."

"Well, as I was saying, when I was a boy, I remember reading about a giant who never went out of a cave, but sent out his wife to lure little boys in to be eaten. When she was longer gone than usual, he roared with hunger."

"Well, what of that, Martin?"

"You don't think that it is possible for one of his pattern to be below there?"

"I certainly do not. Think of the row he would be capable of making. He would have to be very hungry indeed, and lungs as big as a ten-acre field to howl loud enough to imitate a roaring sea."

Martin had by this time put out the light, and they were eating in the dark, and it was so dark that they could see no object, though it were held within an inch of their noses. But Jim was bent on going on, and it was economical to save the light. Martin, on his part, would have preferred more illumination and less exploration.

"But I am in for it, whatever it is," he thought; "but I'm blessed if I don't wish he was not quite so curious. What good can come of diving down into the bowels of the earth?"

It was a question put to himself, and he made no attempt to answer it beyond feeling convinced that the good would, in any case, prove to be infinitesimal.

But there he was, and while Jim went forward there could be no going back for him. So he ate his food with as much philosophy as he could muster, and presently Jim asked him if he had finished his meal. The answer being in the affirmative, the lantern was relighted, and they prepared to penetrate further into the depths of the mysterious underground way.

CHAPTER CLXXXVIII.

ALARM IN THE CASTLE.



CHORKER went in and out the laboratory for a time after the departure of the explorers and his own failure to follow them. He was in a restless mood, being suddenly imbued with the idea that some trace of hidden wealth had been discovered in the cave,

and he wanted his share of it.

The vulgar mind—and, for the matter of that, the refined mind also—longs for wealth obtained by travelling short cuts. The steady plodding, and the slow accumulation of money—pleasant enough in its way—does not command the popular approval, it does not fill the romantic bill.

To come upon a hidden treasure, or to have a fortune left to us, has been the occasional dream of us all.

We know that there is no prospect of either thing coming to pass, but we find a pleasure in dreaming of it. Chorker, thus far, was very human. He had been poor all his life, and he desired to be rich. So he was now in a fever-heat as he thought of the possibility of the chance of landing a lot of money, or its equivalent, and he was not able to avail himself of it.

At length he felt that he must have another try below, and to aid him in his search he managed to smuggle a lamp out of the corner in which they were kept. With it he stole away, and, unobserved, got down the trap to the stairs, which he descended. At the bottom he lighted his lamp, and proceeded warily.

He was approaching the turning that led to the spot where he had previously experienced considerable inconvenience, when he heard a sudden cry of:

"Help!"

It brought him to a standstill, and in the tremor

that overcame him he dropped the lamp. It went out, and he was left in darkness.

There was another cry for help, and somebody rushed towards him. There was a collision, and he and that object, which was Romeo, went down together.

"Spare my wretched life!" cried Chorker.

"What you doing ob here?" roared Romeo, who recognised the voice, and was in a sort of frenzy, arising in part from his grief over the loss of Jim and Martin, and partly from the exasperation he felt from the pain arising out of the meeting in the dark. "What you doin' ob here, I say?"

"Who is it?" whined Chorker; "it sounds like Mister Romeo."

"Don't you 'missa' me, you ole hunks!" roared Romeo. "What you doin' ob here, I say?"

"I came down promiscuous-like," whined Chorker.

Romeo got upon his feet and asked him if he had a match about him. Chorker said he had, and a lamp somewhere as well, "if it wasn't busted up by the fall it had."

"Hurry up, you ole rascal," said Romeo; "dere no time to lose."

Chorker, still shaking like a jelly, brought out his box of matches, and, after one failure, obtained a light. The lamp was broken, as far as the glass was concerned, but the flaring wick was better than no light, and taking it from his hand, Romeo hurried on.

"Where's the others?" asked Chorker, as he stumped after him.

The answer of Romeo was a howl that made the blood of Chorker turn cold. It was as hideous and as morunful as that emitted by a dog which objects to being chained up at night. And it was none the less horrible to the ear with the additions made to it by the echoing properties of the cave. Chorker asked no more questions. He was quite limp as things were, and had all his energies at work to keep up with Romeo, who hurried on faster and faster.

When he reached the steps he suddenly gave vent to another howl, and throwing the lamp down, dashed upwards in hot haste. Chorker, with the heart of a scared rabbit in him, followed as best he could.

The appearance of Romeo, with his wool apparently standing up with the terror of the time, promptly stopped all work in the hall. He staggered towards a chair, and fell into it.

"Dey gone for eber!" he groaned. "You nebber see dem no more!"

Now none of the boys, save Terry, who was not there at that moment, knew of the expedition to the cave. The words of Romeo, uttered in such a wild, melancholy fashion, were therefore enigmatical to them.

"Who is gone?" they cried.

"Marse Gordon and Martin," groaned Romeo. "Down, down a big hole, so deep dere no bottom to it."

Then he groaned, and rocked himself to and fro, heedless for a time of the many questions put to him by the alarmed youngsters.

Miss Elegantine and Eveline entered the hall. On finding the place in a commotion, they came up to the crowd round Romeo to make inquiries.

"Is he ill?" asked the former, as she pushed her way through.

"Something has happened to Gordon and Martin," replied Dawson, "but we can't get Romeo to say exactly what it is."

Miss Elegantine took the negro by the collar and shook him.

"Stop rolling your eyes," she hissed, "and behave yourself like a Christian. What is the matter?"

"Perhaps you had better leave him to me," said Eveline, whose cheeks were colourless. "Romeo, do compose yourself, and tell us what has happened."

Before Romeo could reply there was a shouting of, "Here's another!"

It was Chorker this time who—much the worse in general appearance, let alone his mental perturbation from his recent experiences—came staggering into the room, his eyes rolling in close competition with those in the head of Romeo, and his mouth working feebly, in the vain effort to speak.

There was no ceremony used in dealing with Chorker. Trimmer pushed him into a chair and shook his fist in his face, close to his nose.

"Have you done it?" he cried. "Speak, you old skunk and traitor!"

"I ain't done nothin'," gasped Chorker.

"What has happened, then?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean, then, by coming in here looking like a ghost? Come off that chair and get out of it!"

Trimmer was in such a wrathful state that he, without more ado, tilted the chair up, so that Chorker was shot over the back of it. Falling upon the floor, he lay there more bewildered than ever, while the boys again turned their attention to Romeo.

Under the soothing way of Eveline he was getting more lucid in his explanation of what had happened, but the prevailing disposition to romance that was all his own still governed his powers of description.

"Marse Gordon and Martin," he said, "fell into a hole ten thousand feet deep."

"Are you sure?" asked Eveline, who knew the worthy she was dealing with.

"Me see 'em go," replied Romeo.

"Did they fall together?"

"No; Marse Gordon go firsc. Den Martin want to see what become ob him, and he go too."

"Where did this happen?"

"In de cave round somewhar Marse Gordon know ob. It a long way off. Oh, dat dey should come to dis end! It too awful!"

"Did you see the hole or chasm you speak of?" asked Eveline.

"Clare to trufe miss," said Romeo, "me see him firse. Dere no bottom dat I see, and me teli Marse Gordon not to go, but he so resistant."

"Persistent, I suppose you mean," said Eveline. "It is quite clear to me," she added, turning to the boys, "that something has happened. I hope," here her lips quivered, "that it is not so bad as Romeo thinks. Where is Morse?"

He was not there. Nobody had seen him since he left them in the morning, and it was now approaching the dinner-hour.

"Was he with Gordon?" asked Eveline.

"Clar to goodness, no," replied Romeo; "he somewhar up de tower—de one he orfen go up to."

"Please fetch him," said Eveline; "his clear head will assuredly help us."

But Morse was not to be found. Dibble, who went for him, brought back Terry in his place.

"I wanted to ask a question of Morse," said Terry, as he came in, "and thought I should find him in the tower. He is not there. I found nothing but a basket of tools."

"What shall we do?" cried Eveline, wringing her hands. "Romeo, you can lead us to where this dreadful thing happened, I suppose?"

Romeo thought he could—he would try, anyway; but he was far from being certain as to the exact route taken by Jim. Romeo remembered there were several divergences from the direct path.

"But what de use?" he moaned. "Dey gone sure nuff. Me see de hole, me lay down and hang ober it. And dere no risible bottom to it."

"But are you sure they fell in?" asked Terry.

"Me see dem go," replied Romeo, in a manner that once in a way fully convinced his hearers.

"I should like to see the spot," said Eveline. But the boys would not hear of it. They said the place was not fit for her to visit.

"It comes to this," said Terry, "that if what Romeo says is true, what on earth can help the poor fellows? Therefore we can do nothing. Nor do I feel we ought to until Morse turns up. He can't be far away."

"Is he in the vaults?" suggested Eveline.

No, Morse was not there. The door was locked, and it was known that Jim kept the key.

One by one everybody gathered in the hall. With the exception of the three missing ones all were there. Mr. Farrell heard the story of the disappearance of Jim, Morse, and Martin with a quickened attention.

"They are always prowling about in a way that is sure to get them into mischief sooner or later," he said; "of course they are all dead. It will be a waste of time looking for them. Boys, what are you doing here?"

"Making cartridges," replied Trimmer, who was nearest to the now fast-changing Mr. Farrell.

"I will have no more of that," was the rejoinder, "put all the stuff away."

"My dear," whispered Mrs. Farrell, "you forget."

"I forget nothing," he said, "not even that my power has been usurped. I demand obedience from these boys. Let them refuse it at their peril. Romeo, go about your work. Chorker—get up and don't lie skulking there. I am resolved to be obeyed."

The master-minds of the castle were gone, and the petty tyrant resumed his sway with feeble arrogance.

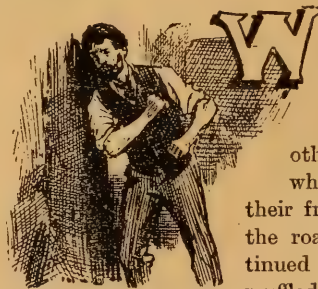
And there were none there prepared to dispute with him. The real power of Jim and Morse had never been more manifest that it was in their absence that day.

The boys were as a nation suddenly deprived of all governing power, and with an enemy clamouring at the gates of the chief city.

Without organisation and generals to lead and command, there could be no army of defence. The rank and file, for the time at least, had to yield to the reassumed authority of Napoleon Farrell.

CHAPTER CLXXXIX.

A STRANGE SCENE.—THE SECRETS OF THE LOWER WORLD.



"We can go on now," said Jim.

They were standing by the opening that was on the

other side of the cave in which they had eaten their frugal dinner. Below, the roaring sound still continued in the unchanged, muffled way they had heard

it all along. Although its volume had not sensibly increased, it conveyed the impression, as they renewed their descent, that it was not very far off. This was in direct opposition to the idea they held in the earlier stages of their downward journey.

As before, the steps were human in origin, but the work by degrees showed signs of age and neglect. Here and there they came upon a crumbling step, and two in the course of a hundred they traversed were entirely broken away.

Suddenly, and the more so because it was un-

expected, they came upon a huge wooden door, with a band of iron running round the edges, and strongly studded in the panels. There was no lock, nothing to hold it close but a bar that ran quite across and rested in a socket at either end.

Martin laid down the basket he carried and forced up the bar.

It gave out the creaking sound that indicates the presence of rust. Then, as the door could not possibly open towards them, owing to the steps being close up, he put his shoulder against it and pushed with all his might. It resisted stubbornly at first, but by degrees yielded until there was an inch or so of opening.

Through that small space burst the roaring sound which had hitherto been muffled. The noise of it was terrible, and the origin of it unmistakable. It was the roaring of a cataract.

They looked at each other in doubt and amazement. What could it mean? They were far below the level of the beach, and, to Jim's way of thinking, well under the lagoon. Whence, then, did this water come, and whither was it going?

Martin, in his heart, would fain have retreated and left the solution of such an uncanny thing to others, but Jim motioned for him to renew his efforts to open the door, and he could do no less than obey. So he once more put his shoulder to it, and pushed it open upon its stiff hinges until there was width enough for them to pass through.

He laid a hand upon Jim's arm, and silently implored him to be wary how he proceeded. Jim, interpreting the look, nodded an assent and went forward into a cave with a level flooring, over which the lantern cast but a very imperfect light. Beyond a very limited radius all was pitchy darkness.

But the roaring could to an extent be located. It came from the far end of the cavern, now partly revealed to their astounded eyes.

The level blackness as they proceeded was soon broken. First of all, by a huge stone table fixed in the sandy soil, around which were a number of crudely-fashioned seats.

At one end—and it was thirty feet long—they saw a seat higher than the rest, for him who in times long forgotten doubtless presided at meetings of the nature of which Jim could not in the slightest degree conceive.

Still further on, as they walked cautiously along the floor, they came to other strange evidences of the past.

Scattered about were huge blocks of stone, on which lay curious implements, strange enough to the pair of explorers, but doubtless to be understood by the learned in such things.

There were heavy hammers, crude knives, pointed tools, and many things of which they could only guess the use, all fashioned in stone, and, what was more marvellous still, for the most part polished.

Jim put some of the smaller specimens in his pockets, and was about to go forward, when Martin touched him upon the arm and pointed to the light. It was a timely reminder, and Jim was obliged to silently admit that they must go very little further ere they decided to return.

He motioned that he would only go a short way, and Martin unhesitatingly assented. So they proceeded, and the flooring still retained its sandy nature, so that they could walk easily along.

Suddenly they saw a curious glittering ahead, such as water that is covered with small ripples shows under the light of the moon, only it was fainter, as if very far off.

Again they stopped, neither being able to account for this unlooked-for phenomenon; and once more Martin reminded Jim of the passing away of time and the wasting light. This time the warning was not to be ignored, so Jim, with an unsatisfied curiosity that was very keen upon him, turned round and, with a wave of his hand, bade Martin lead the way back.

The blacksmith never more readily obeyed an order in his life. He hardly waited for Jim, in his hurry to get out of a place he believed in his heart to be of an almost, if not quite, unearthly nature.

They did not pause to look at the strange council-table, if that was indeed the purpose for which it had been used; although how folks could confer in the dim from the distant waters, it was impossible to say.

Getting beyond the door, Jim signified that he would like it to be closed, and this, after a strong effort on the part of both, was done.

Then up the steps they hurried, through the intermediate cave, on to the next, through the opening in the clay wall, and so on by the path that was more familiar to them.

Martin had a struggle to get through the square hole; but Jim, now that they could speak and be heard, laughingly promised that the road should be widened the next time they came.

"Heaven knows," said Martin, fervently, "that I don't want to come again."

"Why not?" asked Jim, as they hurried on.

"It isn't the sort of place for a matter-of-fact man like me," said Martin. "I wasn't romantic when a boy, and I'm not likely to cultivate the feeling now."

Jim saw the lantern was getting dim, and quickened his pace. Though in no fear of losing his way, he had a dread that was foreign to him of being left in the dark. During his recent adventures in the cave, his nerves had been in a state of high tension, and the reaction had now set in.

At the foot of the steps that led to the laboratory the lantern suddenly expired.

"Murder!" gasped Martin.

"It is all right," replied Jim. "Only this flight, and we are among our friends again."

They were both in a hurry, it could not be denied, although Jim felt rather ashamed of it, and in two or three minutes they were in the laboratory, seated in two chairs by the table, and very much out of breath.

CHAPTER CXC.

MR. NAP FARRELL UNDER ARREST.—MORSE'S DISCOVERIES.



A COMMOTION was going on in the hall that indicated a disturbance of some sort. There were angry voices and defiant utterances, quite foreign to anything heard there recently.

The doorway was covered with a curtain, and Jim stealing up to it took a peep at the outside. A glance showed him exactly what was the matter.

The afternoon was nearly gone, and the light of day was waning. The interior of the hall—the outside door was closed—being dimly lighted, was gloomy. The glow of a smouldering fire was on the faces of those nearest to and facing it. Seated at a table was Mr. Farrell with all the dignity of his reassumed authority thick upon him.

In front of him was a schoolbook of big proportions, which Jim recognised as one in which he kept a record of the coming and going of pupils, their acts and deeds at school. By his side was a candle that just served to illuminate its pages and the countenance of Mr. Farrell.

As Jim peered out he struck the table smartly with a stick, and roared out:

"Silence!"

Whether it was a matter of habit, or of awe, or through a desire to hear what he had to say, the boys became fairly quiet.

"In the decimated condition of my school," said Mr. Farrell, "I must know exactly who remains to me and who has gone away. Do I understand that you absolutely refuse to be enrolled again?"

"I think that is about it," replied Terry, who was standing by the fire; "we have had enough of the humbug and mismanagement we suffered from in the old place below."

"When I spoke to you earlier in the day," said Mr. Farrell, "there was none of this audaciously rebellious conduct."

"We were taken by surprise," rejoined Terry.

"Now that those rebels, Morse and Gordon, have met with a much-deserved fate," said Mr. Farrell, "may I ask who is to take their places?"

There was a silence of a moment or so, and then Dibble was heard.

"If nobody else will take it on," he said, "I will."

A roar of laughter followed this declaration. Even Mr. Farrell smiled, but the next instant he frowned.

Jim heard, with a feeling of dismay, that Morse was still absent, but drew comfort from his own experiences, and refused to believe that anything serious had happened to him. Thinking that the farcical element might now come to an end, he tossed aside the curtain and strode into the hall.

"Much obliged, Dibble," he said; "I shall know whom to rely upon in the future."

A shout that made the rafters ring with echoes went up from the boys. Mr. Farrell sprang from his seat, stared hard at Jim, and then bolted for the door.

"Stop him!" cried Jim.

There is a saying, spoken by a wise man, too, that the boldest army in the world without a trusted leader is nothing but a mob. And being but a mob, it can do little individually or collectively against a small disciplined force.

Thus it was with the boys. With their leaders away they had been at sixes and sevens. But the bare sight of Jim restored them to their vigour and utility.

Half a dozen of them promptly slipped between Mr. Farrell and the door. A frightened look sprang into the eyes of the man.

"Gordon," he said, "beware of what you do."

"I know what must be done," replied Jim; "until your house is ready you must be kept under arrest. Such a dangerous character as you are," he added, sarcastically, "cannot be left at large. Napoleon returning from Elba was a lamb to you."

The boys could laugh now, and they did so most heartily. Mr. Farrell lowered his head and his eyes snapped viciously.

"Will one of you ask Mrs. Farrell to come down here?" said Jim.

Rainstone darted off on this errand, and soon came down, not only with Mrs. Farrell, but with Eveline and Miss Elegantine.

It was gall and wormwood to the deposed usurper to see the greeting they gave Jim. It was not that it was so demonstrative, but it was certainly hearty to a degree approaching enthusiasm.

"Mrs. Farrell," said Jim, "during my temporary absence Mr. Farrell has practically broken his word, and endeavoured to restore the old state of things. That you know can never be. Will you undertake to

keep him from all contact with us until his house is completed? Otherwise I must put him under arrest."

"I really think the responsibility is too much for me," said Mrs. Farrell, with an angry glance at her crestfallen husband.

"Surely you would not leave me to the tender mercies of these boys," he pleaded, humbly.

"You left me to them," she said, "and I have no reason to complain of their treatment."

"I will take charge of him," said Miss Elegantine, briskly.

"You, woman!" exclaimed Mr. Farrell.

"I really cannot be bothered with you," said Mrs. Farrell. "Miss Dibble will look very well after you."

"And I will see that he doesn't bother you any more," said Miss Elegantine.

"Eveline," cried the humiliated man.

"I will assist Miss Dibble in attending to your wants," said Eveline. "Come away. Why will you do such things?" she asked, in an undertone. "Leave the boys alone, and they will be kind enough to you."

"I am a fallen and degraded man," he answered, "even as the mightiest of my name was in his time. He found a miserable home in St. Helena. It is not for me to repine."

He passed his hands across his eyes, made a feeble attempt to straighten himself up in a dignified manner, and stalked out. Miss Elegantine, with an air that was almost military, and decidedly impressive, walked after him.

Jim promised to relate his adventures and give an account of his discoveries later on, but at present he wanted to know about Morse. They told him of the vanishment of that clever young chemist, leaving nothing but a basket of tools behind him.

"He is all right somewhere," said Jim, with a smile. "Now I shall be glad of something to eat as soon as possible."

"Shall I fetch Romeo?" inquired Martin.

"He has returned, I suppose?" said Jim.

They told him of the way Romeo had returned, and the story with which he had unburdened his troubled spirit.

To their surprise, Jim was not so much tickled as they expected he would be.

"Romeo's alarm was natural," he said, "and we must make some allowance for his negro nature. Bring him along, Martin."

It did not take long to bring Romeo there. As soon as he saw Martin crossing the courtyard, he bounded out of the temporary kitchen by Martin, and asked for "Marse Gordon."

"He wants you in the hall," said Martin.

The snow had ceased to fall, the wind had sunk to a zephyr-like whisper. The forecast of the young weather-prophet was fulfilled.

The howl of delight sent up by Romeo could have been heard at sea. He plunged into the hall, and then, fully assured that it was Jim indeed, he performed a dance that must have been bred in him, and inherited from his far-away ancestors in the wilds of Africa, for never in civilised life had anything like it been seen by mortal man.

"Clare to goodness, Marse Gordon," he said, "but you de mose worreful ob libin' pussons. Or'nary genelman bery poor stuff to you. Whar am dere anoder," he demanded, appealing to the rest of the company, "dat go right down to de middle ob de earf, and come up again? Whar de pusson to do it, me say?"

No reply to this momentous question was forthcoming. Martin now appeared, and on his face there was the light of more good news.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Morse is coming across the courtyard, as cool as ever. He has his hands in his pockets, and is softly whistling in that contented way of his when anything pleases him."

They did not shout, because the surprise was not so great as in Jim's case. They had not been so anxious about Morse. He had vanished, it was true, but there was nothing of the dangerous element in his vanishment that there had been in Jim's case.

The door opened, and Morse came in. He was not surprised to see Jim, knowing nothing of his adventures, but he could see in the signs of general half-suppressed excitement that something out of the common had transpired.

"Where have you been, old fellow?" asked Jim.

"In the tower," replied Morse, calmly, "very pleasantly engaged. The time has passed so quickly, that the twilight came upon me as a surprise."

"You were not in the tower this afternoon," asserted Terry.

"Indeed I was, and very busy," answered Morse.

"What eyes you must have in your head!"

"I can see that you have fallen upon something," said Jim.

"I have," said Morse.

"Bags of gold, perhaps," exclaimed Dibble, opening his eyes wide.

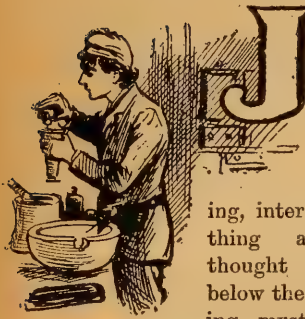
"Better than gold to me," replied Morse, "and what gold, perhaps, cannot buy in any other part of the globe. But excuse me; I have the appetite of a cormorant. If you do not mind, I should like to eat first and talk afterwards."

"Just my idea," assented Jim. "Hurry up, Romeo. Stir that father of yours up. Give us a royal feast to-night."

"For to goodness," cried Romeo, "dat 'bout what me do, for sure."

CHAPTER CXCI.

THE ALCHEMIST'S HAUNT.



JIM'S story was told when they gathered round the fire. They made a big circle, and all listened with the deepest, and it may be said thrilling, interest. There was something awe-inspiring in the thought of that cavern, deep below the castle, with its resounding, mysterious waters, and on some of the more impressionable there lay the feeling of being on some enchanted island. But Morse took the student's view of it.

"You have lighted on some underground river, Jim," he said. "They are to be found all over the world, and even London is not free from them. Under its teeming population run rivers on which the eye of man has never rested."

"It is terrible as well as mysterious," said Terry, with a shiver.

"All created things are wonderful," rejoined Morse. "There is a majesty of mystery in the infinitely little as in the infinitely great. We can only understand things to a certain point. Then we come to a full stop, and are left awe-stricken and admiring."

The majority of the boys had not looked at things in this light. They had taken matters as they came as natural. To them the mind of Morse was as a towering mountain, whose crown is hidden in the clouds.

"As I told you an hour ago," said Morse, beginning his narrative, "I have been in the tower all day, in those inner chambers that have been closed against us. I have inspected them all."

"How did you get in?" asked Martin.

"Not by the doors, you may reckon," replied Morse.

"If you did, you knew a trick of cutting metal that is unknown to me."

"Well, guess some of you how I got there. To assist you, I may admit that it did not take me two minutes."

"I shall not speculate," said Jim, laughing. But others, more eager to answer a conundrum-like question, set their heads to work.

"You blew a hole in the wall," said Trimmer.

"No," replied Morse; "the wall has not been damaged anywhere."

"Got in at the top of the chimney, and slid down it," said Dibble.

"Where is there a chimney in the tower?" asked Morse.

"Of course there isn't one," said Felton. "Dibble, what an ass you are!"

"I do not say there is no chimney," interposed Morse, stopping a reply from Dibble that might have led to a wordy war; "but it is certain that none of you have ever seen it. However, I did not get in by a chimney, but just walked through the stone wall."

"Oh, come; draw it mild," pleaded Terry. "Spare our feelings. We wish to retain our faith in your veracity."

"I walked through the wall," said Morse. "You remember the doors, Martin?"

"Yes—as if I could ever forget them!"

"They are a blind."

"It flashed upon me as you were toiling and moiling at them," continued Morse, "although got up to look like the ordinary door, there was a fixity about them that became more and more apparent to me. Then it flashed upon me that the entrance to the mysterious chambers was elsewhere. So having dismissed you, I had a look round, and speedily dropped upon it."

"In the wall," said Dibble, sagaciously nodding his head.

"Of course you know all about it, you chump!" growled Terry.

"Not in the wall at the outset," resumed Morse. "The first thing I discovered was that one of the stone steps was movable. It did not, to my eye, fit so well as the rest, and I tried to shift it, with the result that it swung round upon a pivot, leaving an opening big enough for a man to drop through. I dropped through, accordingly, too much in a hurry, as it seemed, for underneath there was a fine dust—the accumulation of centuries—that nearly choked me."

"And there were spiders there, of course," said Dawson.

"Naturally," said Morse; "cheerful fat fellows that had thriven for years in a life of peace. But it was a mere hollow under the stairs in which I found myself, and knowing the stone had not been made movable without some object, I looked around me. In the wall on my left, which is the inner wall where the door is fixed, I saw a bronze ring, something like the old-fashioned door-knocker, only five times the size and ten times as hideous in design. The ring is fixed in the modelled head of some creature with a snarling, threatening look that is absolutely life-like in intensity. It would horribly scare wicked boys who indulge in runaway knocks."

"I did not knock," said Morse, after a moment's

rest, "but laid hold of the ring and pulled. As I expected, the stone—it is three feet square—yielded, and came forward on rollers fixed beneath it. At the same moment two others on the right shifted, leaving me a way to creep through. I had to enter upon my hands and knees. There was nothing in that, but I must confess that I went forward cautiously."

"Why?" asked Dibble.

"What a question!" cried Terry. "As if it isn't clear why."

"Well, why did Morse go slowly?" demanded Dibble.

"On account of the dust," answered Terry, authoritatively.

"There was no dust in the opening that enabled me to get through the wall," said Morse. "I went slowly, knowing that people who could so ingeniously construct a secret entrance to a room were quite capable of having two entrances, and one of them a trap for intruders."

"Just what I thought," murmured Dibble. Terry gave him a dig in the ribs with his elbow and told him to be quiet.

"Your thoughts are worth about sixpence a bushel," he said. "Now listen. We shall hear of the gold and jewels Morse has discovered there."

"The three chambers," resumed Morse, "as I thought, communicate with each other, and are shut off from the rest of the castle. They were designed for the use of a man, and he, like myself, was—a student of hidden forces."

"How do you get at that?" inquired Trimmer.

"Because he left his books and some of his tools behind him," answered Morse.

"Did he leave nothing else?"

The question came from the lips of half a dozen listeners. All had gold and jewels on the brain.

"There are a few bottles of chemicals," said Morse, carelessly, "but until I have tested their qualities I cannot tell you what they are."

There was something disappointing to the boys generally in the conclusion of Morse's story, but Jim glancing towards him, saw that the narrator was holding back something. Prudently he turned the talk into the channel of his own discoveries.

"When we have settled in our new home," he said, "and have everything in apple-pie order, I intend to explore every inch of what I may call *my* caverns. Morse has fallen upon a chemist's shop. I may drop upon the forge of old Vulcan. That would suit you, Martin."

While the narratives were being told there was one who sat back from the rest, smoking his pipe and listening intently. It was Chorker squatting in a corner with a rug over his knees, the pariah and outcast of the castle.

Possessed of a mind that was cunning to a degree especially careful of himself and not averse to seeing others in trouble, his thoughts were busy with the future.

The last attempt of Mr. Farrell to recover his lost authority proved that he was still capable of asserting himself in the face of a weak opposition. Suppose he regained his power of a schoolmaster, and Chorker assisted him towards that much desired consummation, would not Chorker himself be a power also?

"Say I waited till one day when Gordon and Morse were *both* down in that cave prowling about diskiverin' what don't consarn them, and *stopped up the way back*, then Nap would be master agen, and we could *both* lord it over the young warmints. I'll do it, but fust I'll give him a hint, or maybe I'll git a dockermert of some sort out of him that would be bindin'. Then I should be certain. I'll try it. Lor! if I could only get even with 'em, what a day I'd have of it! All right, boys. I'm pison to you, and you are pison to me. There's no gettin' out of that. Blow the lot of yer!"

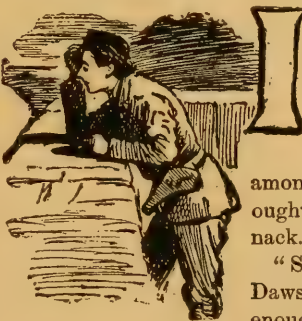
Dawson, who had shortly before risen and opened the door to look at the sky, now announced the state of the weather for the next twelve hours.

"Fine and calm until sunrise," he said, "then a stiff breeze that will blow away most of the snow into the lower ground. It will thaw to a certainty."

"Then work on the morrow can be resumed," said Jim. "Boys, early to bed. I shall rout you out at the hour of sunrise."

CHAPTER CXCII.

AFTER THE STORM.—MORSE TAKES JIM TO THE TOWER.



I THINK, said Jim, as he stood by the gateway of the castle, looking out upon the scene below, "a prophet has risen up amongst us. Dawson, you ought to compile an almanack."

"So I would," replied Dawson, "if I could see far enough. But I only pretend to read the signs that everybody can see for himself."

The sun shone brightly and a sharp wind was blowing. The snow had already, although the sun had risen but an hour, for the most part taken itself to the lower grounds, where it was rapidly melting away.

Overhead there was a long line of wild-fowl making northward, a sure indication that there would be no

more severe weather for a time. Man, with all his wisdom, cannot compete with the birds in foretelling the meteorological workings.

From behind the castle there arose the squeaking of many little pigs whose wants Romeo had gone to satisfy. Up from the beach floated the booming of a heavy sea. Work could be resumed that day, and once more there was the buzzing of voices of happy boys in the lower wood, from whence also came the harsh monotone of the cross-cut saw.

Morse emerged from the castle and laid a hand on Jim's shoulder.

"After breakfast," he said, "when the day's work is laid out, you must come with me to the tower."

"I was thinking of it a minute ago," rejoined Jim. "I suppose you have something wonderful to show me?"

"Surprising, anyway," was the quiet reply. "By the way, you will keep Nap a prisoner, I suppose?"

"I think so. To show weakness to such a man would be bad policy. The old girl will look after him."

"Things have come to something now."

Morse laughed, and Jim smiled.

"At one time," he said, "I thought Nap would be better away. But I have changed my mind. I think this island ought to be kept to ourselves. If he went away he would be blabbing all sorts of things, and we should get a lot of strangers here."

"It is an El Dorado," murmured Morse. "Not like its great namesake—teeming with gold, perhaps, but yet burdened with money's worth."

Romeo appeared round the end of the castle with a huge empty basket in his hand. In it he had been conveying the waste food to his porcine charges.

"Dey 'bout de libeliest lot ob lilly cusses me eber see," he said. "Marse Gordon, dey make one lub 'em so dat me want to eat 'em right away."

"When will the Long House be ready?" asked Morse.

It was a matter that Jim had given more time to than Morse had done. He said they would be able to begin the moving in about two days' time.

"I should get Nap away first," advised Morse.

"His house will take three more days to complete it," said Jim, "and then there will be the furniture to carry down, and the division of stores to attend to."

"I should only give him enough for a week at a time."

"Why?"

"Because he may use things prodigally. And by making the arrangement I propose, we shall be able to keep him better in hand."

"You are right," said Jim, after a little thought.

"I will speak to Eveline, and let her know why we show a seemingly niggardly spirit."

As the wind had not the power to clear away the snow in the courtyard, and its melting there would make a disagreeable mess about, Chorker was set to work to clear it out, which he did under high-shouldered protest. But he comforted himself with the thought that, like the villain in the play, "his time would come."

By-and-by, when the breakfast was disposed of and the day's work arranged, Jim and Morse prepared for their visit to the tower. They were in the hall when Eveline came to them and intimated that Mr. Farrell wished to see Jim. He went, of course, and Eveline remained behind with Morse. He made her acquainted with their arrangements with regard to the house in the chine.

"Whatever you do," she said, "will surely be dictated by kindness and sound judgment. I do hope papa will not do anything foolish again."

"The nature of a man," said Morse, "never really changes. Like chemical substances, the forces of his disposition may, under certain conditions, be held in abeyance; but when the disturbing material steps in, the usual eruption must take place. We leave him to you, however."

Jim returned, and, after a few words with Eveline, left the hall with Morse.

"What did he want?" asked Morse.

"Miss Elegantine to be removed," replied Jim. "He is evidently afraid of her. He looked like a child who has been liberally spanked by his step-mother."

"Did you assent?"

"Certainly not. I told him he had brought it on himself."

"Quite right."

"He also pleaded that she should remain with us, but I pointed out to him that our arrangements, like the old laws of the Medes and Persians, cannot be altered. Finally he asked if he could have fire-arms, and I promised one gun for his own use. He will not do much mischief with it."

"Unless he shoots himself," said Morse.

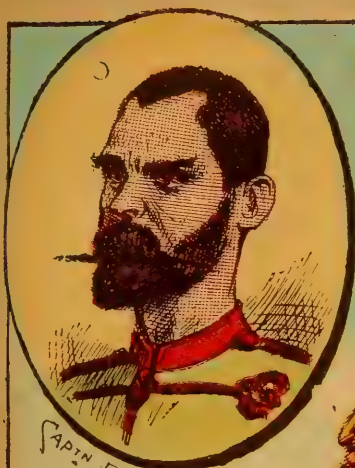
"He is far too careful of his precious self to do that," said Jim.

They ascended to the tower, and Morse showed Jim the first mystery of the entrance to the inner chambers. As it has already been described we need not dwell upon its working. As they dropped down into the opening beneath the stone, Morse said he would have the dust cleared away as soon as possible. It was very fine and pungent to the nostrils, from which latter quality a though sprang into Jim's mind.

"Is this all natural dust?" he asked

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



The Island School.



They all dropped down into the sea, and then the gorgeously arrayed old fossil carefully lowered himself to their shoulders and was carried ashore.

"Well, now you name it," replied Morse, "I think not. Something has been strewn here that long ago would have kept our intruders. Perhaps a sniff of it would have brought on stupefaction."

"How about the inventor who visited the place?"

"He would naturally cover his mouth with some material to stultify its effects. Whatever it was, time has robbed it of its power."

He showed Jim the metal ring with the brazen head, and truly it was as uncanny a thing as one would care to see. It was not the face of man, bird, or beast, but a curiously-wrought compound of all three. The man who fashioned it must have been a genius in the art of producing the repulsive and the awe-inspiring.

Morse shifted the stone, and they passed through the opening. There Jim paused and looked about him.

The light, struggling through narrow orifices in the wall, was dim, but it enabled him to see everything. Piled up in the corners were sundry bales and packages, some enclosed in wood, which Morse said he had not yet examined. On the floor lay a number of crocodile skins, dried and shrivelled. On testing one it seemed as hard as sheet-iron.

"They must have been brought from Egypt," said Morse, "for these were once the crocodiles of the Nile."

"A curious, weird fancy to make a carpet of them," said Jim.

"There was no thought of a carpet in those days," replied Morse. "It was what was in the skins the alchemist wanted."

There was no staircase to the upper chambers. A metal ladder fixed against the wall served the purpose of one. Jim, examining it, told Morse that it was of the same make and material as the ladder in the cave.

"There is a link between the two places," was Morse's comment on this piece of information. "The worker here went there for material for his purpose."

He climbed the ladder, and Jim followed him. The second chamber was of the same shape as the lower one, about ten feet across and twenty feet long, the latter being the width of the tower.

Here they came upon a variety of articles connected with chemistry. Jim could not have told their exact use, but their nature was evident to him from the experience he had had of Morse's labours.

There were glasses of all sizes and shapes, round, square, oblong, twisted, and straight, tall, and short. Likewise there were metal globes with handles, something like the modern ball-cock, copper screws, brass spirals, bars pierced with holes or plain, nails, hammers, curious tools, and, in short, quite a store-house of things of that class.

"It is all very strange," said Jim.

"Talk of treasures," said Morse, with glistening eyes, "what are gold and jewels compared to these to me?"

"But the gold and jewels would buy them?" urged Jim.

"I think not," answered Morse; "for here are the tools and appliances of an almost forgotten art. It was here that some student long ago, so long that I should like to be sure about being within a century or so, studied and gloated over his discoveries, which, if completed, would have shaken the world. Come and see him."

"See him?" exclaimed Jim, thinking that something had gone wrong with his friend.

"Yes," said Morse; "he is upstairs, if that ladder can be called stairs."

"Morse, old man," said Jim, half-terrified, "you are joking, surely?"

"No," was the reply; "and don't be alarmed. I know what I am talking about. I was with him the greater part of yesterday. We said nothing to each other, and therefore did not quarrel."

He ascended the ladder quickly, and Jim must needs follow, because he could do nothing else. But he did it with a doubting heart. The whole thing, including Morse, was so very strange.

The third and last floor, which was practically under the roof where Jim had often trod, was their destination.

On one side was a small furnace, a combination of the class of thing used by blacksmiths, and a copper; for there were the remains of a wood-fire on the top, and a small grating with a door, below.

On the right the bellows hung in semi-ruins.

Around the room were a number of shelves laden with bottles and jars, overhead hung many small specimens of stuffed lizards, shrivelled to half their original size, and in the centre of the room a fair-sized oaken table, and here was the strangest scene of all.

For in the attitude of a man who has lain his head down and fallen asleep, was a skeleton bleached to a pearly grey.

"There is a student of the long ago," said Morse, in a hushed voice. "Don't touch him. The bones are so rotten that they will fall to powder. Can you not read his story?"

"No," replied Jim; "it is a riddle beyond me."

"Look upon the floor."

Jim did so.

"What do you see there?"

"Some pieces of glass."

"A broken glass mask," said Morse. "See there, a small sheet of finely-woven wire to cover the mouth. The two were attached together, and he wore the

mask when making dangerous experiments. One night, or day, perhaps, he was so eager to get to work that he imperfectly fastened it. While stooping over some compound fresh from the furnace, the mask loosened and fell. He inhaled the deadly fumes, unfiltered through the mouthpiece, and was a dead man."

"You have put it together well, Morse."

"I sat here hours yesterday——"

"In such company?"

"Why not? Who but a fool would fear the bones of a dead man? I could not find the thing that killed him, for it must have been something that evaporated. Here is a metal saucer thrust aside in the first terror that followed the falling of the mask. The poison was in it. Stunned by the knowledge of his impending fate, or perchance with not a moment to think of it, the unfortunate man fell forward, his face upon the table, and died there."

"But he must have had friends in the castle?"

"How can we tell that? One fact is here shown, Jim, in the form of a skeleton. The man worked in secret, built this very tower it may be for the purpose—invested it with all the terrors that the superstitious mind of the day would accept, and when his fate overtook him, what then?"

"I can't say, Morse. You seem to have got at it all."

"By inference from signs around us. Say that he was the ruler of the castle or attached to its ruler as a sort of priest. He *may* have been a priest. He toiled here in secret, and one day he entered the tower to return no more. What would they say? Why this: 'He worked with evil aid, and the Evil One has taken him away.'"

"It sounds to me uncommonly like the truth," said Jim, breathlessly.

"Here, then, in this skeleton, may we not have the secret of the castle being deserted?" continued Morse. "Nay, the fate of this man may have for a time left the island unpeopled. The inferior priesthood may have cursed it—I think it very likely. They cursed all students once upon a time, and the thing passed away into a legend. I should like to get at the folk-lore of the people who were driven away to make room for Nap and for us, brought here by him."

"It sounds like a terrible story of the time—well, I cannot say what time," said Jim.

"But I have something more to show you."

"No horrors, I hope. This skeleton has been enough for me."

"No, it is something outside all you have seen," said Morse.

CHAPTER CXIII.

WHAT THE SKELETON MUST HAVE LABOURED TO FIND.



UNDER one of the lower rows of shelves were a number of drawers. They were about the size and make of those we see in a chemist's shop, but instead of being made of wood, they were all of metal.

Morse opened one and took out a small lump of a pale yellow colour.

"What is that?" he asked

"Looks like gold," replied Jim.

"It is not gold, but very near it," said Morse.

"Here is another drawer. Each, I may say, contains some speciality of its own. What is that?"

"Glistens like a diamond."

"Near it, but not a diamond. Here is a fair imitation of an emerald. Not as they make them nowadays, of glass, but close upon the original. In this drawer, and this, there are small bottles containing what I strongly suspect to be poisons. We need not go through them all."

"I think I have seen enough for one day," said Jim.

"The work of the man whose bones are there," continued Morse, "was carried on to find out the secret of the transmutation of the baser metals into gold. He also aimed at the manufacture of precious stones—not miserable imitations, but the real thing. He worked on the lines and studied the laws that govern the productions of such things in the earth. He came very near the truth, nearer than anyone before or since, I fancy. See how cunning and close he was. The very fumes of his crucible and the smoke of his fire passed out through innumerable little intersections in the wall, instead of the ordinary flue. He feared espionage."

"There were great chemists in the old days," said Jim.

"And great ones to-day," replied Morse, "and greater ones yet to come. Here is the workshop I have longed for, dreamt of, and thought beyond my reach. Here will I carry on my work, Jim, and who knows"—here his face shone with enthusiasm—"but one day I may complete the work the man of yonder skeleton began? Shall I not then be rich beyond the dreams of avarice? Would any discovery of ordinary treasure equal this glorious find?"

"Not to you, Morse," said Jim, faintly smiling, "but we simpler fellows prefer the short cut. We have a liking for our gold and jewels ready-made."

"We will hope for your find to be made," returned Morse; "it may come one day. But if not, you have a glorious life before you on the island. Shall we go now?"

"I think," assented Jim, "that I shall feel the better for a little fresh air."

"Here, to me," said Morse, "is the sweetest air."

As they descended to the lower chamber, and stood for a moment looking round prior to departing, Morse tapped the inside of the metal door.

"It is solid, and was never intended to move. I see exactly the object of it now."

"To deceive strangers, of course," remarked Jim.

"And to deceive those in the castle with *him*," Morse jerked his thumb in an upward direction. "Conceive the power of a man over the ignorant minds of the past, when he professedly went daily through *this* door while he really used the secret way. The alchemist left nothing undone to impress his associates with his occult gifts."

"There is sound sense in the idea," said Jim.

"The true use of the sham doors," said Morse, "has only just occurred to me; but I feel sure I am right."

Jim passed out by the secret way and hastened to the open air, which had never before been more grateful to him. He preferred even the atmosphere of the terror-inspiring caverns he had visited to the chambers once occupied by the living alchemist, and now the only resting-place his lifeless body had known. When they reached the terrace, he asked Morse what he would do with the skeleton.

"The bones will hardly bear touching," was the reply. "I must collect them in something, and inter them in the cemetery of the Redan."

"And you will really work there alone?"

"Why not?"

"By night as well as day?"

"Most of my experiments must be carried on at night. The light is too strong by day for the action of the majority of the chemicals to be seen. Think of what a poor show a rocket would make at high noon. It would be all noise and smoke."

Jim wended his way to the Long House, where he found Sleery and half a dozen assistants at work.

The roof was finished, and they were fitting up the interior. One of the back-rooms was almost completed to serve as a kitchen, and mighty comfortable it looked, with a blazing fire on the hearth made of the pieces of wood and shavings that were the surplusage of shelf-making.

The floor was of beaten earth, for planking would have taken away its ranch-like character. It was both firm and yet elastic to the feet. Adam Steene was busy with the dresser, and, as Jim was looking around, he said:

"Hillyard has been in. They have found the spring

from which the pipes have been laid. The sooner the new stone cistern is fixed the better."

"I would rather wait and see if we cannot get at the old one," replied Jim. "It is just possible it may not be broken."

They were busy removing the fallen masonry, Sleery told him, and might that day or early on the morrow give a definite answer on that point. There was not much more of that class of work to do.

The question of fitting up the two long sleeping-chambers then arose, and Sleery suggested that the iron-bedsteads brought from the schoolhouse should be dispensed with.

"I could soon fix a number of sleeping-places," he said, "on the principle, but better finished, of the resting-places of a barrack guard-room. They will enable us to dispense with a lot of things, be more cleanly, and, in the summer time, much cooler and more comfortable."

Jim saw the idea was a good one, and approved. But first of all he wished the house to be occupied by Mr. Farrell to be completed. He directed Sleery to turn his attention to it on the morrow.

At the back of the castle the *débris* was nearly all cleared away. The damage done was considerable, but out of the wrecked kitchen the greater part of the metal utensils had been unearthed, and but a very few were irretrievably ruined. Every article of crockery had, of course, been smashed.

Late in the afternoon they came upon the stone cistern. It was overturned, and chipped here and there, but still serviceable. In triumph it was carried to its new home in the Long House.

The spring from which the perennial supply of water had come was about fifty yards within the wood. The fact of its being overgrown with thorny bushes accounts for its not being observed before.

It bubbled from the ground into a stone basin, placed there to receive the water. A pipe carried it down, as previously described, to the castle.

CHAPTER CXCIV.

THE FLITTING OF FARRELL.



TO describe in detail all the work that was done would fill all our pages, and leave no space for the record of stirring events yet to be related. We therefore skip over three days, and come to the time when Mr. Farrell's new home was ready.

There was no lack in the generous treatment he received. An ample supply of the necessities of the

place were deposited in the house, a one-storeyed log-hut divided into half a dozen rooms. Attached to it was a smaller place of two rooms, where Chorker was to dwell.

Furniture of the best available sort was sent in, and the first supply of stores put away in what may be termed the larder. All the personal effects were taken there also, save those of Chorker, who had to do everything for himself. The only article supplied him was an iron bedstead, to save him from lying on the bare ground.

"What else you may require," said Jim, "you can make in your leisure time."

"All right, my lad," thought Chorker, "my turn'll come one day."

Mrs. Farrell and Miss Elegantine went down and arranged the place, as only women can do. While they were gone, Mr. Farrell was released from arrest, and he mooned about, watching the boys at work. Now that all the arrangements were completed, a feeling of aversion to his appointed home took possession of him. It developed from that into terror.

"I shall be awfully lonely there," he said, "and one of these nights we shall all be murdered in our beds."

He repeated this dolorous prophecy to a dozen or more of the boys, all of whom bade him not worry.

"You have Chorker to protect you, sir," said Dibble.

Mr. Farrell heaped quite a little pyramid of anathemas on the head of Chorker, who happened to be near enough to hear him. For the pair, the day of fitting was anything but propitious.

To the women it was a time of pleasure. They were all weary of the castle; and any home, so long as it was quiet, would be preferable. Though apart from the boys, they would not be entirely severed from them.

It was decided that there should be no fuss about going. In the afternoon Eveline was to take away her father. They would find the place ready for them. Miss Elegantine had promised to have a tea of welcome prepared.

Jim lingered about to get a parting word with Eveline, and it was just as well he did, for at the very last moment Mr. Farrell refused to budge.

Eveline got him as far as the hall, where he sat down, and told her to go on without him.

"If you have a taste for being murdered in your bed," he said, "I have not."

"I am ashamed of you," replied Eveline. "There is nothing to fear, and if there were, are not you the one to protect us?"

"I won't go," he answered, doggedly.

Eveline walked angrily to the door, and seeing Jim in the courtyard, went out to him. She told him how things were, and he smiled.

"You go alone," he said; "Mr. Farrell will soon follow you."

"You will not do anything violent, I am sure," said Eveline.

"Wait for him at the bottom of the path," said Jim.

"You will come and see us sometimes," said Eveline.

"Well—yes—now and then," replied Jim, smiling.

He walked to the gateway with her, and under the shadow of it they parted. Then Jim went back to Mr. Farrell, who was sitting over the fire, bunched up and dogged.

"Why are you not gone, sir?" he asked.

"Gordon," muttered Mr. Farrell, "you have no mercy on me."

"If I thought that you would not be safer in the chine than here," said Jim, "I would not send you. I do it for your daughter's sake. Come, she has gone on. You *must* follow her."

He laid his hand upon the man's shoulder and he looked up, angrily. Their eyes met. The gaze of the boy was that of a resolute man, that of his elder, the shifty look of a wavering child.

"I suppose I must go," said the man, feebly.

"I know you must," replied the boy.

"If I do not—"

"Here you will find neither food nor shelter. Mr. Farrell, this is a real parting between you and me. When you leave here, you will be no more to me than a stranger. I shall be my own master. The arrangements made with regard to supplies shall be carried out. Beyond that, I can have no dealings with you. The door is open."

Jim was very stern, as he could be at a pinch. There was an ominous twitching of the nostrils which showed that he had had enough of Mr. Farrell, and all his vacillations, treachery, and meanness. But for Eveline, he might have been tempted to lay hands upon him, he so despised the man.

Whatever might be the shortcomings of Mr. Farrell in other respects, he certainly had a keen nose for scenting danger in the air. He sniffed it now, and rose to his feet.

"It is a sorry ending to all my hopes," he said.

"You will find Eveline at the foot of the path," said Jim, ignoring his hopes and his sorrow; "it is not what it was once, but you will be able to make your way down. And remember this, Mr. Farrell. You have more than once had dealings with our enemies. If ever you are caught at that game again you will be shot as a traitor."

"Shot, Gordon?"

"I mean it! *S-h-o-t*, shot. I speak plainly enough, I hope. It will not be done in a spirit of revenge, but to save those who are now, I consider,

under my charge. I will do my duty by them, whatever you may have done. If I have spoken too plainly to you, the fault is yours. Now go."

The astounded and dismayed Mr. Farrell stared at Jim for a moment and then shuffled out. It was as sorrowful a fitting to a new home as ever was performed by man. But, as Jim truly said, he was responsible for it all. He had brought upon himself what is worse than hatred, the contempt of those who ought to have been trained to revere and rely upon him in the hour of need. He passed down by the pathway, crudely re-made as a makeshift, and none at labour there so much as glanced at him. He felt it keenly. Out of the severe lessons of life we all ought to learn wisdom. Will Mr. Farrell learn anything from his bitter experiences? We shall see.

CHAPTER CXCIV.

GIUSEPPO THE FAITHFUL.—HARAC AND MARAVELLO WANTED.



IN a week all was ready for the new life. Favourable weather, save that there was more wind than was desirable at times, prevailed. The Long House was duly furnished and made habitable.

"It is the snuggest thing going," was the general enthusiastic comment upon it.

And no doubt it was, for the young and hardy, or those who love a primitive life.

One of the last things done was to put up a sort of huge kennel for Charley, the bear, by the gate of the stockade, and the intelligent beast took to it as naturally as a duck does to water. He went in and out like a dog, and sometimes strayed away for hours.

At first it was wondered where he went to, until, on the fourth day of settling down, Jim, on his way to the chine to pay his promised visit to the settlers there, met the bear coming back. He had been paying a call there, and how he knew of the house being erected was a mystery. During the work of erection and furnishing nobody had taken Charley there.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jim, "where have you been?"

He guessed aright, and the question was put by way of a jest. Charley turned head over heels, and with his tongue out ambled off home.

Jim found Mr. Farrell very busy ordering Chorker about in the garden that had been planned, and looking on as he worked with the dignity of a landed pro-

prietor. On seeing Jim he slightly frowned, but spoke to him with a semblance of cordiality.

"You will find the ladies inside," he said.

The ladies had seen Jim approaching, and Mrs. Farrell, meeting him at the door, gave him a welcome with both hands.

It was astonishing how cosy and comfortable they had made the sitting-room. A bright fire burned on the hearth, and tea was ready upon the table. In the warmer recesses of the chine Eveline had found some flowers, and placed them in vases about the room. Her face brightened on seeing Jim, and Miss Elegantine, coming in with the teapot, uttered a little scream of delight.

In short, Jim found himself very much at home, and was not much disturbed when Mr. Farrell came in and comported himself with frigid dignity.

Jim heard a lot about their new life. Chorker, it seemed, had been disposed to laziness at the start, but had been considerably brushed up by Miss Elegantine, who, on receiving a rude reply from him in response to some request, had boxed his ears.

It will be remembered that she was endowed with a hand especially fitted for administering chastisement, and the subjugation of Chorker was therefore not a matter for astonishment.

Mr. Farrell asked no questions about the boys, but he listened with evident greediness to the replies on that matter given by Jim to his lady friends.

They knew of his adventures in the cave, but they had to wait awhile for further information concerning it. Jim had not been down again.

Morse was, however, very busy in the tower in his new laboratory, and Jim expected great things from him.

After tea they strolled about the chine, where it was sheltered from the wind, Mr. Farrell holding somewhat aloof, but still keeping near enough to hear all that was said.

Chorker, with all eyes upon him, was particularly assiduous in his labours, relieving the monotony of it by occasionally covertly glancing at Jim with the malevolence of a hyæna.

Assured that they wanted for nothing, Jim left as twilight was falling, and as a matter of choice went home by the high land. He had traversed half the distance when he saw a speck of a boat in the far distance, and watched it while there was light enough. It increased in size. A boat was approaching the island.

"I hope it is Giuseppe," he thought.

But he could not tell, as the gloom of night fell upon the sea. Hastening on he was soon home, and he bade Romeo look for the coming of the smuggler.

It was Giuseppe, and about eight o'clock he came up the path and was taken to the Long House. He

had arrived empty-handed, but announced that he had three crates of fowls below, which he was sure would be welcome.

The huge living-room was pretty full, as all save the negroes, Harac, and Maravello, were there. They were in the kitchen.

After he had eaten his fill, he brought out his pipe and sat down by the fire.

"What news from Minorca?" was the question Jim put to him.

"She has reached home," replied Giuseppe, "and only the fiend and a woman like her could have ridden so small a boat over that stormy sea."

"You mean Lucia di Valo?" said Jim.

Giuseppe nodded.

"Since she came home," he said, "Spartola has kept indoors, and the governor—bless his baby carcase!—goes about with an escort. They are all afraid of her."

Giuseppe laughed heartily. The idea of the great men shrinking before a woman amused him mightily.

"I might have been afraid, too," he said, "for she met me in the square and charged me with having deserted Reonardo. Faith! I kept an eye upon her hand, for she is quick with the knife. But she is a changed woman."

"What about the letters and parcels for us?" was Jim's next question.

"Well, the governor says that they shall be delivered if you will go and fetch them. Nothing has arrived as yet."

"It is not possible for me to leave the island."

"So I told him."

Here Johnny Daw, who was chatting with Trimmer and Terry, suggested that when the time came he should go for the things.

"I know the old fool," he said, "and he knows me. I don't think there will be much trouble with him."

For many days past Johnny Daw had been working with Martin, and Jim had seen little of him. There was no coolness between them, but Jim had so many things to attend to that his new friend was for the time neglected.

"Why should you run the risk?" asked Jim.

"Risk!" said Daw, laughing; "hang the risk! Look here! I'll go back with Cobbles and Smith when Giuseppe returns, and you bet there will be no bother."

Cobbles and Smith, who were watching an interesting game played with pieces of stick and chalk by Martin and Sleery, gruffly remarked "that they wasn't afraid of any governors livin'."

"Alone," said Giuseppe, "the old sinner can give me a lot of trouble. He is shy, however, of quarrelling with an Englishman."

"If you think——" began Jim.

"Consider it settled," interposed Johnny Daw. "I am a restless beggar, and trotting about suits me."

"Keep clear of the dark-eyed senorita," advised Terry.

"I am not afraid of losing my heart to her," said Daw. "Bless you! I've a sweetheart at home, only I have managed to forget her name."

"I want to make a trip across the island," said Jim, "very badly, but I must go with the assurance that all will be well here in my absence."

His mind was running on the "Guadalquivir," with her well-laden hold, which he had but imperfectly explored.

"You will never be able to do that," said Giuseppe, "because the mind of the governor—bless him for a fool!—changes like a weathercock. How long will you want to be away?"

"A week or more."

"Go now, then," said Giuseppe. "I will accompany you. There is no chance of an invasion just yet. By the way, you have two men here, Harac and Maravello. They are particularly wanted at Minorca for a murder. I advise you not to keep those hang-dog rascals here."

"They seem to be grateful for such kindness as we have shown them," said Jim; "but I must confess that I do not care for them."

He told Giuseppe of the unaccountable number of deaths, when Lucia di Valo attacked the castle, and the peculiar indications of some of the men having died under strange circumstances.

"Harac and Maravello finished the fellows," said Giuseppe, coolly. "The highest and best way of showing gratitude, in their eyes, is to kill somebody for you."

"What is to be done with them?"

"Ah! there, senor, you put me a puzzling question. If you let them know that you do not like the way they expressed their gratitude, they will face about the other way. My advice is that you had better shoot them."

Jim could not of course entertain this proposition. Nor could he, now that he understood their characters, keep them there. Still something would have to be done with them.

"Senor," said Giuseppe, "it is a pity you are not a Spaniard of my breed."

"Why?" inquired Jim.

"I could settle them, but I see that you mean they should live."

"Yes, as far as I am concerned."

"Why are you going across the island? Tell me that, senor."

Jim explained to Giuseppe that he desired to overhaul the "Cagliula." Send those two fellows on ahead to begin shifting the cargo," said Giuseppe.

"Can they be trusted?"

"Yes, senor, until they find out that you despise them. Give them a general idea of the road to take, provisions for a few days, and they will find the 'Cagliula.'"

"It is a good idea," assented Jim.

He hardly knew how to treat the two men, for whom, now that he thoroughly understood their dispositions, he could not but feel an aversion. For the present, however, it would suffice to send them away, and leave the further disposition of them to the future.

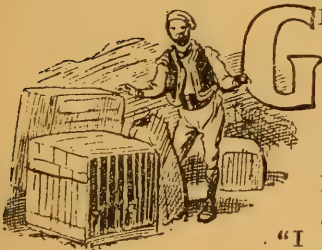
It was a strange all-round position. The men, as things were, would have died for him, and yet they were in their ordinary lives desperate scoundrels, thieves, and murderers at a pinch.

He could not rest until he had learnt if they were willing to go. So he sent for them, and made known his desires. They listened with their accustomed immobility of countenance, save that once Harac glanced at Giuseppe in a questioning way, as if he believed it was a matter of his arranging.

To Jim they simply said they would go, and in an hour they were gone.

CHAPTER CXCVI.

THE EXPEDITION TO THE "CAGLIULA."



GIUSEPPO'S advice is good," said Morse, "and I think if you are going within a month or so, now is the time. But we have hardly settled down yet."

"I know," replied Jim.

"But when I have got an idea into my head it has to be done at once. My plan is to just run over and see if there is anything worth fetching away. If there is, we can afterwards organise transport parties. There is no knowing what good things may be awaiting us."

"And the cave, Jim?"

"That will keep till I return. I never mince matters with you, Morse. You understand me when I say that at the present time I am not inclined to go there again. I want toning up, and a short roughing it in the woods will do it."

"I understand you," said Morse. "Now as to Nap——"

"He needn't know that I am gone. Keep it close. I shall take Giuseppe with me—no others, unless it be Romeo——"

"I should take him, Jim."

"Very well, so be it. Giuseppe, Romeo, and myself, and we start to-morrow."

"You won't think of visiting the Dead City?"

"No; that is to be left as a *bonne-bouche* for all of us in the sweet by-and-by, say early in the coming summer."

They were on the way down to the beach, whither Giuseppe had gone with Romeo and several others to get the fowls out of the crates. The hour was about nine on the following morning.

Minorca fowls are celebrated as good useful birds, and Giuseppe had brought at least a hundred of the very best.

"All last season's birds," he said, as the group of admirers stood around the broad, flat crates. "The roosters are of the governor's special breed."

"I hope to goodness he came by them honestly," murmured Terry in Jim's ear.

"We must ask him for the receipt," replied Jim, who had some small doubts himself as to how the smuggler became the possessor of the birds.

Two dozen hens and three roosters were selected and sent on by some of the boys to Mrs. Farrell, with Jim's compliments. Giuseppe suggested that one of each of their wings should be clipped, so as to prevent their flying, until they got used to their new home.

This was a wise and necessary precaution. It also had the advantage of being a painless operation.

So all the fowls as they were taken from the crates were operated upon to this extent. Though unhurt, they expressed their indignation with a lot of unearthly "quorking."

For the present those retained by Jim for the use of himself and chums were to be located in the deserted hall of the castle.

Giuseppe had brought a bag of oats with him, and he suggested that a portion should be sown.

"They will grow anywhere," he said. "Scratch the earth with a hoe, and cover them up. By June you will have a heavy crop."

"All we want now," said Dibble, as he made his way up the path with two rebellious hens in either hand, hanging by their legs, "is a cow or two."

"Or a mad bull or buffalo," growled Terry. "Perhaps you would like a hippopotamus, or an elephant, or a crocodile?"

"We may have some cattle one day," said Dibble. "I'll see to it."

Terry laughed. He had no idea of Dibble having come into knowledge of his fortune, or indeed that he had a right to one, and the idea of his ordering a cow tickled him immensely.

"The day your cow arrives," he said, "I'll eat my head."

"You may be obliged to make a meal of it," said Dibble, "and you can have it all to your own cheek, for none of us are cannibals."

"I can't think what's come to you, Dibble, lately," said Terry, staring at his companion. "Once you were so meek and mild that you never had a word to say for yourself."

"I had an aunt sitting upon me then," replied Dibble, "and she was rather heavy."

Terry tossed his head up, as one does when something incomprehensible is met with. Dibble was getting more and more of a conundrum to him every day.

The fowls were all housed safely, save one rooster, which got away from Dawson and went off flying in a lopsided fashion up and down until he reached the wood and there disappeared.

"Good luck to him for a fool!" said Dawson, viciously, "he'll be cackling for his grub by-and-by."

During the day Jim quietly made preparations for his expedition, Romeo and Giuseppe assisting.

They did not intend to burden themselves with a tent, but relied upon sundry rugs and the opportunity the wood would give them for making such shelter as they required.

Romeo and Giuseppe each selected an axe, not too big, that would be very useful in lopping off branches of trees and cutting brushwood to lie upon.

Three bags were filled with such provisions as were light to carry and nourishing. For drink they carried coffee, and Romeo was to see to the coffee-pot and things to drink out of.

There was no fuss whatever, and Jim's desire that the expedition should not be talked about, save among themselves when at home, was made known.

Johnny Daw very much wanted to go, but Jim said the smaller the party the better, as he wished to get out and home with as little delay as possible.

Morse promised to abandon his studies during their absence, and remain in or near the Long House as its chief and ruler.

Romeo received instructions to be ready with the sun in the morning, and, as a matter of fact, the trio went off before that luminary showed its head above the sea.

So quietly did they take their departure that the only witness to it was Charley, in his hut by the gate. He lay with his snout resting between his forefeet, and, in response to Jim's whispered "Good-bye, old chap," merely grunted and blinked his eyes.

"Pears to be sulky, Marse Gordon," said Romeo, "cos you not ax him to be one ob dis joyful scursion party."

"He looked as if he would have shed a tear for a trifle, senor," said Giuseppe.

"Charley has many moods," was all Jim said.

Whatever Charley might have been thinking of, he was out of sorts, and for hours after Jim had gone he lay in the same attitude, blinking his eyes and sniffing now and then. He was very much dissatisfied about something, although what it was it is hard to say.

CHAPTER CXCVII.

HARAC RUNS AMUCK.



HIGH and dry lay the "Cagliula" when Harac and Maravello arrived on the summit of the cliff and looked down upon it.

They had lost not a moment in getting there, having scarcely stopped to rest and snatch a few hours' sleep. They were eager to do Jim Gordon service. The one virtue left in the men was gratitude.

There was, however, very little in common between the men outside this feeling. Maravello was a Spaniard with a cross of the Romany blood in his veins, and Harac was two-thirds of a Malay. One was apt to suddenly burst out in anger on little provocation, while the other stored up his resentments until he was like a volcano with a thin crust of earth between his fires and the open air.

That is no doubt the secret of the ordinary Malay's outbursts that he occasionally exhibits. For a time he goes about in a quiet, sullen way, scarce speaking to his fellow-men, but all the while he is nursing some embitterment, or perhaps more than one, which acts upon him as additional fuel does to a fire.

Suddenly something stirs it all up, and the crust is broken. Then comes the explosion.

It was characteristic of the two men that all the way they exchanged very few words. Maravello sang Spanish songs and talked of the sunny vineyards of Spain. Harac said nothing. It is doubtful if he listened.

So they came to where the vessel was lying and climbed upon the deck. Their orders were to begin clearing out the hold so that the exact nature of the cargo might be ascertained.

On the upper side, it will be remembered, there were cases of light wine. Jim was aware of this, but he did not fear the result of the men helping themselves, as the liquor he had tasted was almost innocuous.

Maravello took off the hatch of the hold and peered down into the depths below. Espying the cases, he

smacked his lips and sang a fragment of song about the merits of good red wine.

He fixed up some hoisting gear, and appointed Harac to do the hauling up while he attached the cases below. It was about noon when they began to work and a very little toil made them thirsty, for the sun at that hour had considerable power.

"Let us open a case," suggested Maravello, as he climbed out of the hold. "With so many, how can one be missed?"

Harac assented in silence, and the case was broken open. They drank a bottle of wine apiece and were little the worse for it.

After that they returned to their labours.

So on through the rest of the day they toiled, resting at intervals, and never without emptying a bottle apiece.

When night fell, Maravello, prowling about the vessel, found an old guitar, with a string short. Making the best of it, he strummed away in accompaniment to his own songs, while Harac, with a pipe in his mouth, lay upon the deck listening or busy with his own thoughts.

The morrow came and they toiled on. Upon the deck there was now a big pile of cases containing wine. In the afternoon a change in the cargo was found, but it was in cases still.

"By my faith," said Maravello, when he turned over the first, "but here is some rare stuff! Harac, my son, to-night we will be merry indeed."

It was French brandy he had come upon.

There were not more than a dozen cases, but each held a dozen bottles, and, as the Spaniard said, there was enough for all to have a sip.

When the first case was hoisted to the deck, Harac became as one aroused from a sleep.

His eyes flashed as he saw the trademarks outside—the diamond and the O. D. V. He and brandy were old acquaintances.

"Good!" he muttered.

Then peering into the hold, he cried to Maravello: "Hasten. Finish the work. To-night we will be merry indeed."

"The work will take us more than a week yet," remarked Maravello: "but it is a poor dog that cannot have his night to himself."

They worked until nightfall, and then, without waiting for the evening meal, opened one of the cases of brandy and uncorked a bottle.

"Drink," said Maravello.

Harac put the bottle to his lips, and drank.

"Good—more than good," he said, as he handed the bottle to Maravello; "it goes through a man."

They became merry indeed; but long before midnight were lying as senseless as logs upon the deck.

When the morning came, Harac opened his eyes,

and brushing away his matted hair, endeavoured to recall the events of the previous evening. He was assisted by the sight of an empty brandy-bottle beside him.

"Who said, take a hair of the dog that has bitten you?" he muttered. "It is good."

He crept to the open case and took out another bottle. With his knife he knocked off the neck, and drank as if the fiery stuff had been water.

Then he aroused Maravello, who sat up and groaned.

He, too, partook of the hair of the dog that had bitten him, and they resumed their labours. Neither had any appetite for eating, and so they went on until noon, toiling and drinking.

At length a change came over Harac.

"I've done," he said; "I work no more for any man."

Maravello crept out of the hold. He, too, was worn out and wanted a rest. But on seeing Harac looking at him with eyes that were as wild as those of a hungry wolf, every particle of colour fled from his cheeks. The very bronze of the sun vanished, leaving a dull, ashy grey behind it.

He had seen a Malay run amuck before, and he knew what that look portended. Unnerved by his potations, he had not the courage to assume the offensive, or even to defend himself. Springing to his feet he leaped over the side of the vessel and fled for his life.

With a frightful howl, Harac sprang after him and gave chase. Endowed with fictitious strength, Maravello raced for his life. Reaching the cliff, he climbed up it, and Harac, with the agility of a wildcat, pursued him. The summit was reached, and, just as he had attained it, Maravello slipped and fell. With a rush he came upon Harac, who seized him round the waist and stabbed him in the back. Then they went tumbling down together to the ground below, Harac striking blindly with his knife, until they reached the solid earth.

Maravello was already gone, and Harac, striking the ground with his head, broke his neck, and turned over upon his back—dead.

And thus they were found at eve, when Jim and his companions arrived on the cliff.

"I knew there was murder in the half-caste," said Giuseppe; "and see here. They must have struggled together up here, and fallen. Trust me, senor, though they were grateful to you, you were well rid of them."

Jim made no reply, but in his heart he could but agree with Giuseppe.

They descended to the level, and, after a brief examination of the men, Romeo was left to bury them, and Jim and Giuseppe walked on to the stranded vessel.

CHAPTER CXCVIII.

A VERY USEFUL CARGO.



THAT night nothing could be done beyond glancing at the work which had been performed by the two men. The empty brandy-bottle supplied a clue to the cause of termination of their labours. The tragedy was accounted for.

"Give a Malay or a half-caste brandy, senor," said Giuseppe, "and he goes mad. They all know it will be so, but cannot resist the temptation."

As the nights were cold, and the deck was less sheltered than the wood in which they had slept on the way, Jim took possession of the chief cabin, and Giuseppe and Romeo were quartered in the forecabin.

On the morrow, the work so suddenly brought to an end by Harac's madness was resumed by Romeo working in the hold, Giuseppe hauling, and Jim in arranging and sorting the cargo as it came on deck.

Very little of it was damaged by water, the hold having been closed at the time the vessel was cast upon the shore.

How it was done Jim could not understand, but Giuseppe told him that a few years before a huge wave had rolled upon the shores of this and the adjacent islands, carrying everything before it with resistless force.

"How it arose, senor," he said, "is not for me to say. Some think that under the sea there lies a vast monster with a broad flat back. Sometimes he raises it, and then come the great waves. But, as a rule, he sleeps."

"Some volcanic disturbance must have taken place," remarked Jim. "When the terrible eruption of Vesuvius buried Pompeii, the sea rose up as if its bed had suddenly heaved. Your great flat-fish, Giuseppe, is not so terrible as the hidden forces of the earth."

Under the cases of wine and brandy the cargo proved to be an assorted one.

There were boxes of cutlery, bales of cloth, crates of earthenware and glass, and sundry other things that were of more value in Jim's eyes than silver and gold. The only thought that troubled him was about the ownership, but Giuseppe bade him be easy on that score.

"She was insured in one of your English offices, and paid for, I doubt not, as being at the bottom of the sea."

Having cleared the hold, Jim turned his attention to the cabins.

As there was no log-book or anything that could give a clue to the vessel's destination, or establish the identity of its captain, it was pretty clear that the officers and crew had deserted the "Guadalquivir" in mid-ocean.

Had they been thrown ashore with her they might have escaped from the island with boats, but on gaining the mainland they would assuredly have seen that all in her that was worth removing would be taken away.

At sea, therefore, she must have been abandoned, and reported as having foundered.

Jim really felt no compunction in appropriating this useful mass of treasure-trove. In the chief cabin there was a good barometer, and a lot of nautical instruments which would be of use as ornaments for the Long House. There was also a very good meerschaum pipe, which was handed to Romeo as his especial prize, and with which he was delighted.

"Dis take all de sawdust out ob de ole folks wif dere trumpery clays," he said.

In the forecabin there were a few odds and ends belonging to the crew, but nothing of value. In a store-place they found a lot of tools and canvas for the making of extra sails. Everything that could be of use was laid aside for removal.

"It will cost some labour getting these things through the wood," said Jim; "those crates, for instance. It will be impossible to move them as they are. They must be unpacked, and the contents taken away piecemeal."

"Senor," said Giuseppe, "in our country, where the roads are rough and animals scarce, we make a sort of sledge and haul our goods home. The young senors are not afraid of work. They will gladly each do his share. Already we have a clear track through the forest. Say that, as we return, we widen it here and there by cutting away the brushwood, and, behold! there is the road. Or let the senor return, and leave Romeo and myself to get on with the work."

Jim approved of the idea, save that he proposed to send Romeo back and himself stay behind to assist Giuseppe.

He wrote a note to Morse, explaining briefly all that they had done, and bidding him use his own discretion as to the number of assistants he would send on.

Romeo received his instructions and sped away. Jim lingered awhile looking over his welcome store of necessities, his mind dwelling on all the possibilities and probabilities of the coming year.

If he had possessed a magic wand with the power to bring him what he willed, he could hardly have wished for more than had fallen to his lot.

It was evening when Giuseppe left, and Jim decided to pass the night on board. In the morning the work of widening the forest-path where necessary could be begun.

It was nothing very laborious, as for the most part of the way an ordinary sledge could travel between the trees. It was only where the undergrowth grew strongly that a clearance would have to be made. And it was material that could be easily cut away.

When the assistance sent for arrived, a week would suffice to make a fairly clear road across the island.

In the morning he started with Giuseppe for the wood. Their way led them to the high land that commanded a view of the Dead City. It was about a third of a mile away, and in the clear atmosphere the walls, and gates, and buildings stood out with the distinctness of a photograph.

"A strange place, senior," said Giuseppe, as they stopped and looked down upon it.

"You do not know why it is deserted?" suggested Jim.

"There is a story told," said Giuseppe, "that a wonderful magician once lived on the island—not there, but on the other side, in the castle, it may be. He could call down fire from the skies, rend the earth at a word, and he declared that he would live for ever."

"Rather a rash assertion that," said Jim.

"Well, the people worshipped him, so they say," continued Giuseppe, "until one day he disappeared."

"Left the island, I presume, tired of humbugging the people?"

"No, he just vanished, senior. Then the people became alarmed, and said that he had been carried away by the Evil One, and because they had been wicked enough to worship him they would be accursed. Then one of the people arose and said they must make a pilgrimage somewhere to cleanse themselves of their sin, and they built boats in which they went away in a body. But a storm sprang up and wrecked them here and there, and but a few survived. For generations none dared return to the island, and when they did, none ventured to live in the city polluted by the worship of a fiend."

"Truly a good story, Giuseppe."

"To me, senior, it has been nothing more, nor to my people. We did not believe in the city, and I only believe now because I see."

"There is some truth in the story," said Jim.

Giuseppe had, in fact, completed the history of the mysterious man who had died in the castle.

Jim could see it.

He was the man of science who thought he had discovered the secret of turning all metals to gold, and also must have conceived the possibility of his prolonging his life indefinitely.

But his arrogance had been cut short by a carelessly tied string and one whiff of a powerful poison. There was death for him, and a scare for those who ignorantly believed in his occult wisdom and strength. These things combined brought about the depopulation of the island.

And now it was, with all its wealth and mysteries, in the possession of a handful of boys! What would they do with it? was the question Jim asked himself, as he strode on towards the wood.

CHAPTER CXIX.

A BUSY TIME.



ON receiving the message from Jim by Romeo, Morse promptly told off half the boys under Ganthony and Terry for the work of completing the path through the wood. Then he conferred with Sleery and Martin as to the more suitable form of sledge for the purpose of transporting

the goods, and all available hands set to work to make them.

Terry and Ganthony, as soon as they could get the necessary tools and provisions together, set out, the arrangement being that others with the sledges should follow as soon as possible.

Sleery speedily knocked the first sledge together, and Martin put runners of iron hooping to it. This was a pattern for the rest, and the number they designed to make was ten in all.

They were ready by noon the next day, and Morse despatched them after the party that had gone to clear away a path through the wood. There then remained with him in the castle only three others, namely, Martin, the blacksmith, Hamlet, and Macbeth.

The castle was kept closed, and they lived in the Long House. As far as they knew there was nothing to fear, and, pending the return of the sledges, Morse and Martin laid out the plans of a subway direct from the Long House to the castle.

The plan was to dig a very deep trench to the back of the castle, make an entrance in the wall, roof the trench in with timber, and cover the whole with earth. It was not designed to last, but it would serve them as long as they were likely to require it.

"Apart from its being a short cut out to the castle," said Morse, "it may prove to be very useful when going round to the front gates may be highly inconvenient."

"Which, sir," said Martin, "is your way of putting the possibility of the old drum being again in a state of siege?"

"You never can tell," said Morse, "and as you and I have nothing better to do, we can get on with some of the digging."

It was a new thing for Morse to do manual labour, but he went at it as one to the manner born. In the two following days they not only had the trench dug, but the crude doorway pierced and some of the rude roofing finished.

In the afternoon, when they were down in the hole they heard the welcome voice of Jim, and came out to give him greeting. He was alone, and he told them that the journey through the wood had been successfully accomplished. He and Giuseppe met the first party, who had cleared a way with extraordinary rapidity, and Giuseppe took them back to the "Guadalquivir."

Six hours afterwards Jim met the sledges which he had sent on, and he reckoned on the morrow that the first consignment of goods would arrive. He complimented Morse on the idea of a subway to the castle. The considerable amount of stores now in their possession could not be kept in the Long House. Henceforth the castle would serve as a warehouse for their property.

It was late on the morrow when the first sledge appeared, under the guidance of Trimmer, with four assistants. They brought with them six cases of cutlery, which they conveyed into the castle and opened. Martin examined the goods and declared them to be of the very best Sheffield make.

"There is none to beat it in the wide world," he declared.

Jim remained at home. He left the despatching of the cargo to Giuseppe, and the transportation filled an entire week.

There were three big chambers in the castle filled with the boxes and bales from the wrecked "Guadalquivir." Their entire value was estimated by Martin to be but little under three thousand pounds.

While all this work had been going on Jim had not been near the Farrells, and no message had come from them. He now thought it time to go down to the chine and see how they were getting on.

He found everybody at home save the great Nap himself. Chorker, as much under protest as ever, was busy in the garden planting early potatoes. He favoured Jim with a bow of mixed resentment and servility.

"We were wondering what had become of you," said Mrs. Farrell, as Jim sat down. He explained that he had been very busy, and asked after Mr. Farrell.

"He is out with his gun all day," replied Mrs.

Farrell; "but what he does with it I cannot tell. He never was much of a sportsman."

This was true enough. With the gun the deposed schoolmaster might, at a pinch, have hit an elephant, but nothing smaller. But he soon appeared, earlier than was expected, and with a flustered look upon his face. He shook hands with Jim, to his great astonishment, and from that act of courtesy he judged that something was wanted of him.

"Gordon," he said, "you know I am not an alarmist, but really this island seems to be infested with all sorts of people of the most objectionable nature."

Jim looked at him inquiringly, but he did not immediately explain. Having given a minute or so to wiping his forehead, he resumed:

"It is Moors, or blackamoors of some sort, anyway," he said. "There was quite a party of them on the beach, about three miles from here, going through some of their horrible rites."

"What leads you to suppose they were Moors?" asked Jim, who, truth to tell, was deeply perturbed by this intelligence.

"I go by their faces and their dress," said Mr. Farrell. "Their boat, too, was one of those high-prowed things we see in pictures—quite unlike anything I have seen on this side of the Mediterranean."

"I should like to get a glimpse of those fellows," said Jim.

"You can't; they are gone."

"What direction did they go?"

"Straight across towards the African coast."

"I would not be disturbed, if I were you, sir. It is evident they have no notion of our being on the island."

He motioned for him to say no more before the women folk, but Mr. Farrell was never over-considerate in that respect, and went on:

"They have found on these shores a fitting spot for their secret unholy ceremonies, and they will come again."

"We will not fear the evil until it comes," said Eveline.

"All I can say is," said Miss Elegantine, who was laying the cloth, "that if I am sorry for anyone it is for the Moors or blackamoors. I haven't the least doubt about the end of their interfering with the brave boys."

Jim thanked her, and turned the conversation, as if the coming of these strangers was not of much consequence; but he made up his mind to visit the spot named by Mr. Farrell before going back that night, to see what he could make of it.

There was little to detain him beyond the pleasant society of Eveline, and at an early hour he left them. With three hours' daylight left he hastened up the

beach, for the most part easy travelling, until he came to a spot where a fire had recently been burning.

A few feet away there was a deep red bloodstain upon the sand, but whether of man or beast Jim could not tell. There was nothing else to give him the least clue to the rites, if rites they were, which had been performed by these strangers.

On the whole, he was inclined to think there was nothing to worry about, but at the same time resolved that a bright lookout should be kept.

He was back in time for supper, and among other topics that cropped up was the proposed visit to Minorca. Giuseppe was ready, and Johnny Daw and the two seamen were eager for the voyage; so it was arranged they should start on the morrow.

Giuseppe drew Jim aside for a confidential chat on a matter he had in his mind.

"Senor," he said, "it has come to me to propose to you that we build a big boat, capable of carrying many of us—a strong boat to weather the storm."

"A good suggestion," replied Jim, "but none of us are exactly boat-builders."

"You are clever, you can do anything, and I was brought up to the craft. All the boats I have ever had have been of my own building. I say to you it is done so and so, and you will have it done. There are no skulkers here."

"It is a pity you are going to Minorca," said Jim, after a pause, "for the idea is a good one, and I should like to see what we could do with it."

"I must go," said Giuseppe, "for Senor Daw is given to rashness, and he may have need of a friend there who knows the people. But while I am away you need not be idle. For material, you have it by the sea."

Jim looked at him inquiringly.

"The 'Orsini,' senor—she is ashore, hard and fast. Break her up, and behold, there are materials for many boats."

"A most excellent thought, good Giuseppe."

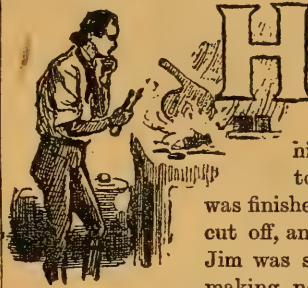
"Then for a spot to build our boat," pursued Giuseppe, "behold, there is higher land close to the sea. The young senor who could blow the earth to the stars"—this was a great compliment to Morse—"will soon fashion a rough dock, and Sleery the carpenter will make a gliding way of timber down to the sea. Can it not be done?"

"It not only can but shall be," replied Jim. "I thank you for a good suggestion. Such a boat may indeed be useful some day. You will hasten back as soon as you can."

"Trust me, senor. The air of Minorca is not so sweet as this."

CHAPTER CC.

MORSE'S EXPERIMENTS.—THE BUILDING OF THE BIG BOAT.



HAVING done with Giuseppe, Jim strolled out with the object of paying a visit to Morse, who was in

his new quarters in the tower. As the subway

was finished, half the distance was cut off, and although it was dark, Jim was soon through the castle, making no more disturbance than

arose from the sleepy cackle of surprise that arose from some of the old hens roosting in the great hall. He knew there was no need to stand upon ceremony with Morse. Although all others were expressly forbidden to enter the tower on pain of being despatched somewhere in fragments, it was free to him. So he passed into the chambers by the secret way and slowly ascended to the upper room.

He had no fear of seeing that grim skeleton again, for Morse had taken it away; but he could not entirely resist a "creepy" feeling that came over him as he peered into the mysterious laboratory.

Morse was busy with a crucible over a fire, and had not heard him approach. The red glow lit up the handsome features of the boy, and it struck Jim that never before had he seen such a rapt, eager expression upon his features as there was at that moment.

Fearing to disturb him, Jim came up no further than enabled him to rest his elbows upon the flooring, and in that attitude he remained for fully ten minutes, waiting for Morse to stir. At length he raised his head and sighed.

"Nearer," he murmured, loud enough to be heard, "but not right yet."

"Can I come up?" inquired Jim.

Morse did not start, although evidently surprised. He merely glanced over his shoulder, and said:

"Of course you may. Why do you hesitate?"

"I fancied I might set something going," answered Jim.

"I am not engaged on explosives now," said Morse, "but on the transmutation of metals."

"Will you ever hit upon it?" asked Jim, as he sat upon the corner of the table.

"It is impossible to say," returned Morse. "The whole thing may be a dream. But you have come for something more than to question me?"

"It is a thing that would keep," replied Jim, "but I am still eager to tell you of it."

And then he laid before him Giuseppo's suggestion about the building of a big boat.

"It is a splendid idea," said Morse, "and the boat had better be built: but how long do you think, Jim, we are going to live in clover here?"

"We are subject to interruptions, of course."

"I am not thinking of foreign interruption. What I fear will come from our friends. Just as we manage to get a little model colony going they will be sending for us to go home."

"Then we won't go," said Jim, resolutely.

"All very well for you, or for myself, perhaps, and maybe two or three more, but the majority have friends who won't think of allowing them to remain."

"We had better go on as if we were going to live here for ever, and take things as they turn up."

"All right, Jim, I am content. But the thought has come to me more than once, and I thought I might just as well mention it. Look here."

He gave the crucible a shake, and dropped a small pinch of powder into it.

"Now watch," he said.

Jim did so, and out of the crucible there rose a thin column of vapour that gradually unfolded at the top and spread out like an umbrella. Then from the interior of it there fell a number of sparks of the most brilliant hues. Jim uttered a cry of admiration.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I don't know," replied Morse, "but I mean to find out. There's parlour fireworks for you, eh?"

"Magnificent!"

"That little drawer in the corner is quite full of it," said Morse. "There is enough for ten thousand private little displays of this nature. Well, Jim, go to work upon your boat, and good luck attend the building and launching of it. I'll run over with you in the morning and see into the making of the necessary dock."

Whatever the project, Morse always entered into it with his whole heart. Early in the morning he was down by the shore with Jim, where the "Orsini" had grounded. She had been driven in by the wintry winds, and was almost as high and dry as the "Cagliula" on the other side of the island.

Jim had a look at the small cave where the extra cargo of the "Orsini" had been stored away. It was still there.

"We may know one day what the brand 'G.T.H.' means," he said. "I don't feel that I have a right to this part of the cargo as I do with that of the other craft."

Morse thought he took the right view of it, as it was early days since the wreck as yet, and they went out to select the spot for the building of their boat.

A sloping bit of ground was selected, and Morse pointed out where a judicious bit of blasting would create a rough dock. A gliding way to the sea was simply a matter of labour. Then they returned to the castle.

A few hours later they parted with Johnny Daw and his companions bound for Minorca. To the reiterated piece of advice not to get into trouble, Johnny smilingly replied that he was "all right."

But neither Morse nor Jim was quite so sanguine.

"He is much too rash in his way of doing everything not to get into trouble if there is a chance of doing it," said Morse. "Have you noticed him hauling timber? He goes at it with a rush, and tumbles it about, getting big pieces upon his toes and about his shins. There is no coolness or judgment in what he does."

But he was gone, and all they could hope for was his safe return. Then they turned their minds to the new work in hand.

Before night set in, Morse had blasted out the hollow in the rough, and a gang set to work shaping it into regular form. Others began to break up the "Orsini," and haul timber to the dock, and Sleery and the rest of the men cut down some trees that grew between the castle and the sea to make into logs for the gliding way.

This was not the work Morse generally personally assisted in, but he was never idle. Calling to mind the mysterious visit of the men observed by Mr. Farrell, he walked over to the spot on the following day and carefully examined the ground.

The ashes of the fire were still there, but, as before, nothing peculiar was at first to be observed. Suddenly it occurred to him that the stones, which had been put in a sort of circle to keep the materials of the fire together, were of peculiar formation. They were all of the same size, or nearly so, to begin with, and they were flat, bearing some resemblance to a skittle-ball.

Glancing round, Morse could see nothing like them in the neighbourhood. They must therefore have been brought by the strangers, whoever they were.

"And they will come again," thought Morse.

As the presence of strangers on the island was not to be encouraged, Morse did the best thing to discourage them that he could do under the circumstances.

Believing that some rite had been performed there, and that the men would return to repeat it, he carefully scraped a hollow in the sand, and with a piece of stick drilled a small hole.

Into this hole he dropped a small pellet he took out of a box he carried, and filled up the hole with ashes.

"The next time they come," he said, "they may find something to astonish them."

And Morse never made an assertion of this nature unless he had good grounds for it.

CHAPTER CCI.

HELD AS HOSTAGE.



FIVE busy days passed away, and then one morning Giuseppe's boat came gliding into the lagoon. His coming had been observed, and there was a party waiting to welcome him, among whom were Jim and Morse. To their dismay the smuggler was alone.

But he had his boat laden with packages, which was promising, so far. Why then was he not accompanied by Johnny Daw and the two seamen? He ran his boat aground, leaped out, and saluted.

"First, senors," he said, "we will unload, and then I will tell you everything."

"I must ask one question," said Jim. "Are they alive?"

"They are, senor."

"And well?"

"In excellent health, senor."

There was an indication of evasion in the latter answer, but they did not question him further.

His boat was well laden with the stores ordered by Mr. Farrell some time before, and, to the profound astonishment of everybody, a big case addressed to "Oscar Dibble, Esq."

"The esquire," said Terry, "is particularly fetching."

Dibble, who had taken possession of the case with feigned calmness, said he was as much an esquire as Terry and all his family put together.

"This case," he added, with emphasis, "contains a few articles I have ordered for myself and as gifts to my friends."

This was more astounding than ever. Not knowing of the changed circumstances of Dibble, it was incomprehensible to the listeners. They had always understood his aunt kept him remarkably short.

"The old girl has been shelling out freely, I guess," said Terry, rubbing his head.

"What I have spent was mine to spend," replied Dibble, with exasperating coolness; "and I could have spent ten times as much without thinking."

"Will you explain what it all means?" demanded Terry, wildly.

"No, I won't," roared Dibble; "you have worried me often enough, and now I mean to have my go in.

Somebody help me to knock the lid of the case off, please. Gordon, Morse, please don't go away. I have something for you."

There was no lack of help to get the lid off, for the curiosity of all was most powerfully aroused. The boys had it off in a trice, and a packing of paper-shavings having been removed, two leathern cases were revealed.

"One for each of you," said Dibble to Jim and Morse. "Winchester repeaters, with all the necessary things for keeping them in order and making cartridges."

They looked at him dumbfounded. The glad smile upon his face was worth looking at. He held out a hand to each.

"You are two brave fellows," he said; "and but for you we should all have been dead long ago. I won't make a mystery of this any longer. Some time ago I learnt that I was rich and could have plenty of money to spend. Why I haven't known it before doesn't matter. I have forgiven all that and mean to forget it. You will accept my present, won't you?"

"With all our hearts, and thank you," replied Jim. "Dibble, you are a good fellow. Fancy keeping this thing a secret!"

"I meant it to be a surprise."

"And it is—a very great one."

They opened the cases, and, with eyes gleaming with pleasure, looked upon the wonderful weapons lying so snugly there.

The rifles were of the very best—Winchester repeaters, with all the latest improvements.

And, as Dibble said, there was all that was requisite to keep them in order, and the neatest of cartridge-making machines, nothing lacking; and they thanked him most heartily.

Judging by the pleasure exhibited on his face, Dibble felt that he was amply repaid for his gift.

But this was not all the case contained. Deeper down there were pencil-cases and pocket-knives, and what not. In short, something for everybody, including the facetious Terry.

Last of all there came to light a broad, flat box, which Dibble said was mainly intended for himself, although he did not want it all.

"I couldn't eat two stone of it," he said, pathetically, "without making myself everlastingly sick, fond of it as I am."

"What is it?" asked Terry.

"Butterscotch."

The roar of laughter this reply elicited was shared in by all. Dibble laughed with the loudest.

"I was always awfully fond of it," he said, "but never could get more than a single cake of it. Now that I have the chance, I thought I would have a fill of it."

Jim and Morse, leaving the merry party, walked away with Giuseppe, anxious to learn why Johnny Daw had not returned.

"Senors," said Giuseppe, "it is a whim of the governor's. He holds him as hostage."

"Hostage for whom?" asked Jim.

"For you, senor."

Jim started, and Morse looked quickly up. Here was a serious piece of news.

"It is the wish of the governor," said Giuseppe, "that his eyes should behold you."

"He could attain that object by coming here," said Jim.

"Senor," said Giuseppe, "he is not fond of the sea, or he would come. Though a mighty man and a fearsome one in his wrath, when at sea he is as a child. It puts him to bed like a baby. He cries for a nurse. It is a pitiful sight."

"But why should he desire to see me?"

"He has heard, senor, of your doings, of your having defeated Reonardo, of whom the governor stood in wholesome dread, and he cannot believe but that you are a giant among men, and not a youth."

"May this not be some subterfuge to get possession of us and our island?" suggested Morse.

"No," said Giuseppe, "for he asks but to see Senor Gordon. Moreover, he has been compliant as to my bringing away yonder things. Furthermore, he is treating your friends as guests."

Still, it was not so clear as it might have been why this great man, who had shown how capable he was of varying moods, should desire to see Jim. Not for his own sake did he hesitate, but for those whom he looked upon as his charges.

"The Senorita di Valo knows of the governor's wish," remarked Giuseppe.

"And what says she to it?"

"That you may come. She swears that if he plays you false, she will assassinate him with her own hand. And she is a woman of her word."

"Her slaying the governor," said Morse, "would not compensate us for the loss of Gordon."

"I say to you, senor," pleaded Giuseppe, "come. No harm shall befall you."

"There is no other way of releasing the hostages, I suppose?" mused Jim.

"No, senor. The governor is so strong about the head."

"Then I will go, and the sooner the better."

The face of Morse lengthened.

"Could we not send somebody to represent you?" he said.

"But suppose there is peril in going?" hinted Jim.

"Ah! true—I forgot. Jim, you must go."

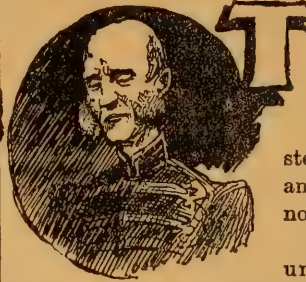
"And at once. Giuseppe, when you have rested, we will set sail."

"Senor, I rest as I travel. Thus—I mark the wind and put up the helm for the true course. Then I lash it and close my eyes. So I get my sleep. I am ready."

"There is no need to speak of my going until I am gone," said Jim to Morse. "Take care of my beautiful repeater. I won't take it with me. Nothing, not even my revolvers. Get the fellows to clear off with some of the cargo, and then we will slip away."

CHAPTER CCII.

JIM AND THE GOVERNOR.



THE chief towns of Minorca are Port Mahon and Ciudadela. It was the latter Giuseppe steered for, as there in the ancient citadel the governor by choice resided.

Don Carlos Spartola was undoubtedly descended from some of the oldest blood in Spain, and he inherited all the pride of a once dominant race, if the fires that made the country great in ancient days were dead within him.

He was an old man, which of course did not improve his tendency to be mulish, but he was not devoid of that chivalry which Cervantes laughed away and left his country a blank. Johnny Daw and his two companions were simply hostages. Therefore, they were well cared for. They had their quarters in the north-west part of the citadel, whence from the walls of a tower they had a view of the sea.

But a prison is a prison, though its chambers be upholstered in velvet; as a cage is a cage, though it has golden bars; and the trio lounged on the wall one afternoon, looking towards the sea with eyes that were dim with the longing for liberty.

"Kind o' queer business this, Mister Daw," remarked Cobbles, as he pressed down the tobacco in his pipe with his forefinger. "I can't say as I can make head nor tail on it."

"It is quite clear that we have one of Nature's curiosities to deal with," replied Johnny Daw. "The idea of making one man a hostage for another to pay him a friendly visit, could not have emanated from a less fertile brain than that of Don Carlos Spartola."

"Suppose Mister Gordon won't come?" suggested Smith.

"In that case," replied Johnny Daw, "we are here for a lengthened stay."

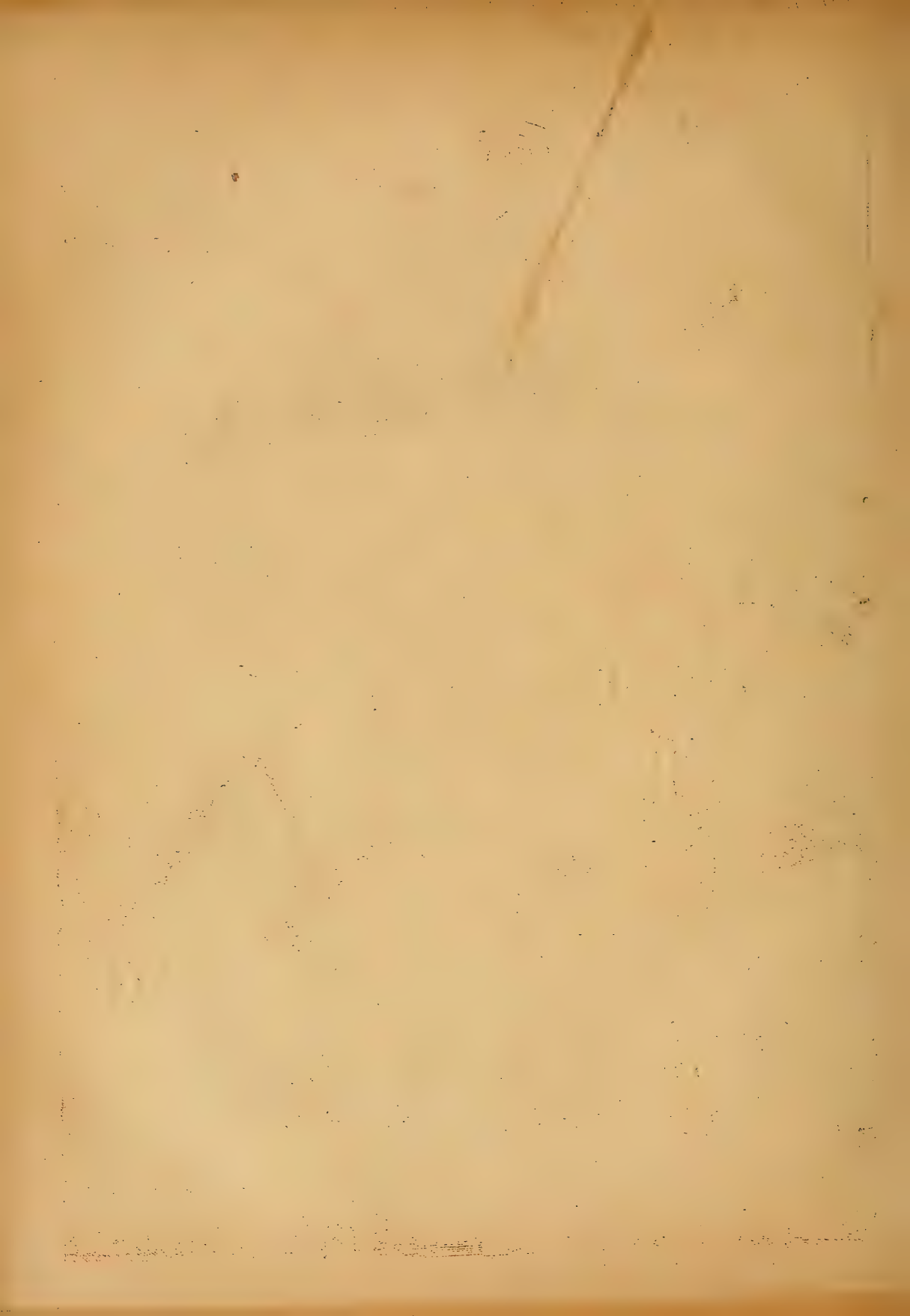
After that there was a gloomy silence. They had a

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



"What is that for?" asked Mr. Farrell. "To christen the boat with, senor." "Merciful goodness, what a waste! Muddy water would do as well."



fine view of the town and the sea, and at another time the scene below would have amused them. Men and women were moving to and fro, children played by the shore, and on the waters a hundred small craft danced about to and fro with their tall tapering sails gleaming in the light of the afternoon sun.

Also far out at sea there were craft of various sizes moving about, some towards the east, others to the west, and one steamer bearing up from Gibraltar was coming inshore.

Being so high up and so far off, it was not possible to distinguish the features of men and women, but the outline of a dress out of the common was easily discerned.

It was, therefore, with a gasp of surprise that Johnny Daw suddenly observed a small boat coming, for in its stern sat a youth attired as an English sailor.

It was Jim with Giuseppe, but Johnny Daw feared to make sure of it until he saw the pair coming up the winding way towards the gate of the citadel.

"What a trump the fellow is!" he cried.

The seamen, neither of whom had heeded the new arrivals, asked him what he meant. He explained that Jim had arrived, and pointed him out below. He was now very near the gate, and the seamen, at the risk of pitching down and breaking their necks on the stones below, leant over the wall and sent forth a loud cheer. Jim looked up and waved his hand in recognition, then passed closer in out of sight.

"We may put our kit together," said Smith, facetiously. "The cap'n's come for us, and we shall soon be all aboard."

"Wait a bit," remarked Johnny Daw; "we are not released yet. Out here things move slowly."

This was true enough. Jim and Giuseppe were admitted to the citadel, and the latter gave their names to an officer lounging about. He went away, leaving them to cool their heels in the courtyard for half an hour. Then he came back with the information that the governor was still enjoying his siesta and could not be disturbed.

"But his excellency," urged Giuseppe, "told us he would receive us when we came."

"I cannot awake his excellency on your bare word," was the cool reply.

It was intimated to them that there was a waiting-chamber, where they might rest, and the officer pointed it out to them on the left side of the courtyard. He likewise said something about sending them some wine, and lounged away.

The waiting-chamber was a dull hole of a place, but it had some lounging-seats, and was in the cool. Giuseppe threw himself down, with a curse.

"The governor will never be more awake than he is at this moment," he said, "but that dog of a fellow

did not take our names to him. He wants a knife between his ribs to quicken his movements."

"Would it not have a contrary effect?" asked Jim, laughing.

"It would stop his impudence," said Giuseppe, grinning fiercely.

The wine was a long time in coming, but it came at last. It was brought in by a dark-eyed wench, who stared at Giuseppe in surprise, then burst out laughing.

"Senor Giuseppe in the lions' den!" she exclaimed.

"Not for the first time," he answered, "and I am here at the lion's bidding. Is his excellency in the citadel?"

"Right surely he is, smoking in his garden."

"You are sure of that?"

"Can I not see him from our room? Have I lost sight of him these two hours, walking up and down and addling his pate reciting sonnets to the birds? How true it is that no man is too old to love or to make a fool of himself!"

"And who is the lady?"

"They say it is that firebrand, Lucia di Valo, and if he will marry her, she will not say nay, for to be wife to his excellency will suit her proud spirit."

The girl lingered a little longer talking over some of the gossip of the town, and then went her way.

"Said I not so?" said Giuseppe. "That worm of an officer has not troubled to announce us."

Jim was beginning to chafe under this treatment, for it was not what he expected or desired. He hoped to have been able to gratify the curiosity of the governor and get away again before nightfall.

But it was not to be. The hours crawled away until darkness came, and then at last the officer reappeared, and announced that his excellency was prepared to receive them.

They feared to reproach him for the unwarrantable delay lest he should play some further scurvy trick upon them, so they followed him in silence through many passages and sombre ways, until he threw open a door in a broad corridor, and announced:

"Giuseppe and a stranger, your excellency."

He motioned for them to enter, and closed the door behind them. They found themselves in a luxuriously-furnished chamber, and seated at a well-spread table were two men, the old governor and a priest. Before them were fruits in season and several wines, of which they had apparently partaken freely.

The governor eyed them as they advanced with half-closed eyes, and motioned for them to be seated on two chairs a little apart from the table.

"Perhaps you have need of something," he said.

"Your excellency," replied Giuseppe, "we have been here many hours, and have had nothing but the thin wine of Medoc."

"Here many hours!" exclaimed the governor, "and I have but just heard of your arrival. To whom did you report yourself?"

"To Captain Divantes," replied Giuseppe, who knew his man. "It was at three o'clock, and he declared that your excellency was still sleeping and could not be disturbed."

"The insolent dog!" cried the governor. "He——" The priest nudged him by the elbow and whispered a few words in his ear.

"Ah, yes, true," he muttered; "'tis but the word of a smuggler. Divantes must be heard before we condemn."

"I had better have said nothing," muttered Giuseppe, loud enough for Jim to hear. "The word of a smuggler will go down before that of an officer. I like not yon priest either. He is not friendly to us."

"Young senor," said the governor, addressing Jim, "your name?"

"James Gordon."

"You are of English birth?"

Jim bowed.

"Now, I have sent to see you, for of a truth a strange story concerning you and others has reached my ears. First of all, there is a school established upon the island?"

"Yes; it was done some years ago, your excellency," replied Jim.

"What was its purpose?"

"Merely to give boys a healthy life as a fitting accompaniment to education."

The priest smiled, and helped himself to some grapes.

"It is not true, then, that you had designs upon the peace of any country?"

"There is not a shadow of truth in the story. Left to ourselves, we should not have harmed a living creature. What we have done was in self-defence."

"Your leader is one of the Napoleon family?"

"He is an Englishman. It was on account of a fancied resemblance to the great Napoleon on the part of his father that led him to be so named."

"It was dangerous to indulge in such a vanity," remarked the priest.

He did not look at Jim nor at Giuseppe, but occupied himself with the fruit and wine, uttering his remarks in a casual way for the ear of the governor alone.

"Now, there has been bloodshed upon the island," said the governor. "How do you explain that?"

"We were attacked," said Jim, "and merely defended ourselves. May I give you an outline of the story?"

"Let him speak as much as he pleases," said the priest.

Jim was a fair hand at telling a story in brief, and he told it to the governor without departing a hair's-

breadth from the truth. The governor listened like one deeply interested. Nor was his attitude unfavourable to the narrator.

"It is practically the same story told me by Lucia di Valo," said the governor, in an undertone, to the priest.

"They may have concerted it together," was the answer. "Much of the blood of the faithful has been shed. We must have more proof than can be given by the shedder of it."

"Giuseppe will confirm him."

"Giuseppe has become false to his country and his people," said the priest; "but I will not urge you. Do as you please."

"Advise me, Father Anselmo," pleaded the governor.

"Seek further proof," was the reply. "Send a strong body of soldiery to the island, and let them bring back more witnesses—willingly, if they will, by force if nothing else will serve."

"I cannot do that yet," muttered the governor, biting his lip. "I must, at least, sleep upon it."

"So be it," replied the priest; "but see that none of your charges escape you. My son, receive my blessing. Good night."

CHAPTER CCIII.

THE BROKEN WORD OF THE RULER.



THE priest was gone, leaving the sting of his words behind him. The governor filled a glass of wine and drank it off.

Then he looked up and coughed.

"Your story," he said, "requires confirmation. The——"

"Pardon me," interposed Jim. "I came here by your invitation, sir, with the understanding, and in the full belief, that my life and liberty were safe. I trust you will see that it is right to set me free with my friends without delay."

"Since I sent the message to you that I would hold your friends in hostage," said the governor, "various matters of the deepest import have come to my knowledge. I should be lacking in my duty if I did not see them cleared up."

"I demand my liberty," said Jim. "I am a British subject, and have not infringed any laws of your country. If a would-be murderer assails us anywhere, we shoot him. They were murderers who assailed us

in our island home, and we slew them in self-defence."

"Father Anselmo tells me the men were but fishermen who landed to dry their nets, and that they were wantonly attacked."

"It is not true!" cried Jim, hotly.

"It is my intention to send men to your island to make further inquiries."

"I trust they will get a hot reception, and have no doubt they will."

Giuseppo nudged him by the arm, but the blood of Jim was up, and he went on at full steam.

"You have falsified your name and position, Sir Governor," he said, "by your treatment of me. But it is a matter that will not be allowed to rest. Set me free, and you will hear no more about it. Detain me another hour, and take the consequences!"

They were bold words from a boy, and not without some effect upon the old governor. But he could be as dogged as a mule when he pleased, and, rising, he struck a hand-bell upon the table.

"To-morrow you will learn what I will do," he said.

The officer, Divantes, came into the room. There was a hesitation in his manner, as if he expected a wiggling. But a glance at the hot, angry face of Jim put him at his ease.

"Escort these men, and confine them with the rest until further orders," said the governor.

"You will repent this," said Jim, proudly.

Giuseppo merely grinned, very much like an angry cat. Then they followed Captain Divantes from the room.

"Faith!" he said, "but you are a pretty pair to come hither swaggering and demanding to see the governor. The next time you will be more modest."

They did not answer him—of what avail would it have been?—but followed him in silence. He escorted them to a big chamber, where Johnny Daw and his companions had been fuming over the delay in the hoped-for release. Giuseppo ventured to remind the captain that they had had nothing to eat, and he told them that "the prisoners' night-rations would be served at nine o'clock," and, closing the door, locked it.

"The prisoners' night-rations" had an ominous ring in it, but the meeting with Johnny Daw prevented any comment upon it.

The wrath of the young sailor, and of his companions also, when they heard of the treatment Jim and Giuseppo had received, was very great, and some hot threats were uttered.

"It is useless to give way to rage," said Jim. "What we have to consider is: what chance is there of making our escape?"

"But what has changed the old man?" asked Daw; "he was friendly enough when dealing with me."

"It is the work of some of Reonardo's friends," said Giuseppo; "they have secured the good offices of the priest. Still, we have one friend, if we could only get her to know of our position—Lucia di Valo."

"We will trust to no friends," said Jim, "but to ourselves alone. Where are we?"

"In the chief tower," replied Johnny Daw. "Through yonder door is the rampart on which we are allowed to walk by day."

"Is the door locked?"

"No; they are not afraid of our departing that way. There is a sheer drop of sixty feet, and the roughest of ground below."

Jim opened the door and walked out. Daw followed him.

There was a moon in the west, and at their feet the twinkling lights of the town. Sounds of voices, of laughing and singing and the twanging of the guitar, rose up pleasantly enough to the ear.

Jim leant over the parapet and looked down. It was not a promising place for a descent, but with a rope he thought he would have risked it. But he had no rope, and no prospect that he could see of getting one.

"Do they supply you with bedding?" he asked his companion.

"Yes, of a sort," was the reply; "some grass matting and shoddy-made rugs to cover you. They won't tear in strips, but when you pull at them, they come to pieces in the form of fluff."

"You have thought of making a rope of your bedding, I see."

"Yes, Gordon. When one is in a place like this, there is little else to do but to think. I have certainly wondered what I should do if you did not turn up. I am sorry you came now."

"Never mind that. Here we are, and it will go hard if some of us cannot devise a means of getting the better of these Spaniards. It must be done sharp, too, for Spartola designs sending some men to Fermentera, and if he does there will be ructions. I ought to be there to regulate matters."

Jim was very uneasy. The lookout was bad. He walked up and down for a time thinking, while Johnny Daw leant against the stone wall silently watching him.

Giuseppo came out by-and-by, and asked if either of the seniors had a pencil and a strip of paper. It was a strange request, and they both stared at him.

"It is for me to send a letter to a friend," he said, simply.

Jim had what he required, and Giuseppo, kneeling down upon the flags, wrote a few words. Then he glanced around, and from a crumbling corner of the

masonry broke off a small piece of stone, which he wrapped in a paper.

Having done that, he put his hand to his mouth and uttered a cry that was like that of the seamew when disturbed in her nest. After a short delay, there came an answering cry from the direction of the shore.

Giuseppo, a few moments later, repeated the cry, and a second answer came back, this time nearer. This was done again and again, until the person below was sure of Giuseppo's location, and presently the form of a man was seen creeping up to the base of the tower.

No more cries were uttered, but, aided by such light as the sinking moon afforded, signals were exchanged.

Finally Giuseppo dropped the stone and paper, and the man stole away.

"He will be here in two hours with a rope, senor," he said.

"But how in the name of fortune are we to get it up here?" asked Jim.

"The senor shall see," was the simple reply. "It is an old trick, but, like many old things—good."

For the present he advised they should return to the chamber and remain there until their supper arrived.

It was close upon nine o'clock, and they might expect it in half an hour or so.

Giuseppo did nothing towards their escape, but, lying down, conversed with Cobbles and Smith on seafaring matters until their supper arrived. It was then approaching ten o'clock.

Divantes came with the men who carried it, and he bade the prisoners hurry up with their supper, as he purposed making some change with the sleeping-arrangements.

"There are too many of you here," he said; "you are incommoded. A nice, cool, separate room for some will serve you better."

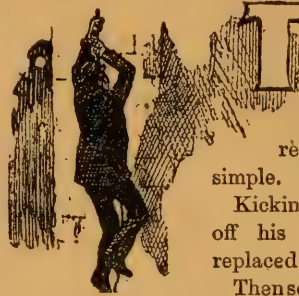
"We would rather all be together," Jim ventured to say. "Surely it is not too much to ask, considering the injustice of our confinement here?"

"I know nothing of the injustice of it," said Divantes, who seemed to have taken an especial dislike to Jim; "but you will do well to accept my arrangement. I will come for you—say in an hour."

He stayed to light a cigarette, then, with an insolent swagger, left the chamber.

CHAPTER CCIV.

CAPTAIN DIVANTES DOES HIS WORST.



"THIS," said Johnny Daw, "is simply destructive of all your plans, whatever they are."

"My plans, senor," replied Giuseppo, "are simple. See, I start upon them."

Kicking off his shoes, he drew off his worsted stockings, and replaced his shoes.

Thensquatting upon the ground, he handed one of the stockings to Cobbles.

"Find the end," he said, and unravel it.

"Senor," he continued, addressing Jim, "what is more simple? I unravel my stocking, and, with a small piece of stone tied to one end, it is enough to reach my friend below—when he comes. To it he fastens a light cord; we haul it up. To that a stronger cord is bound, yet another and another stronger and stronger, and at last the rope. Said I not that it was simple?"

They applauded him quietly but heartily, and fell upon their supper. But the joy created by the simplicity of the plan was considerably tempered by the promised visit of Captain Divantes to separate them.

The one hope they had was that he would be as dilatory in that as he had been in other matters, and not put in an appearance until the birds had flown.

The plan was so simple and feasible that all were assured of success, if no interruption took place; but the doubt was a harassing one.

Giuseppo, of all there, seemed to keep up his spirits.

"It matters not so much his coming," he said, "so that he comes alone."

The door leading to the ramparts was opened just as a clock in the town was striking the hour of eleven. The sounds in the street below had by that time sensibly diminished, and there appeared to be more brawling than music in what sound there was.

"They begin the evening with love-making," said Giuseppo, "and end in bloodshed."

He sauntered out with the unravelled wool of his stocking formed into a skein in his hand. He listened for a few moments without apparent satisfactory result, and then attached a small piece of masonry to the end of the wool. His companions stood in the doorway, watching him with breathless interest.

Again he listened, and after a short delay a soft cry came up from the foot of the tower. He did not answer it, but proceeded to pay out the wool over the

side of the tower, doing it warily, lest it should all slip and fall, and this — their one hope — be extinguished.

But there was wool enough and to spare. While yet many yards remained in the skein, it ceased to run. Then he waited until it was gently shaken from below, and he began to haul in.

Giuseppe motioned for Jim to take the unwound wool while he hauled the rest clear of the stonework of the tower, lest its roughness should fray and break the light material.

At length a fine twine attached to the wool came to hand, and Giuseppe drew a deep breath as he secured it to Jim's arm.

"Senor," he said, "the worst is past. In a quarter of an hour we shall be free."

As he spoke, there was the sound of a key being thrust into the lock of the other door, and every heart stood still.

Giuseppe motioned for them to all come into the open, and they could but obey him. No plan had been devised for this emergency. He entered the room and closed the door.

It was Captain Divantes, and he was alone. On seeing nobody but Giuseppe, he frowningly asked where the others were.

"The ramparts are cooler," replied Giuseppe. "They prefer sleeping there to this stifling den."

"Fetch them hither," said the Spaniard.

"It is not my office," replied Giuseppe. "Though a prisoner, I am no man's slave."

Captain Divantes uttered an angry exclamation, and vowing that Giuseppe should suffer for his insolence, strode towards the rampart door.

Giuseppe sprang forward and dealt him a terrific blow on the side of his head. He fell heavily, and lay still.

Using a fine cambric handkerchief of the officer's as a gag, Giuseppe bound it securely round his mouth. Then tearing up his scarf, he twisted it into a serviceable rope, and, with a sailor's skill, knotted it about his arms and legs.

"As pretty a bit of work as ever I did in my life," he murmured.

He would have liked to stay to admire it, but time was precious, and he hastened to join his friends, who meanwhile had not been idle. Four cords of increasing stoutness had been hauled up, and the rope they were to trust their lives to was on the way.

It arrived, and Giuseppe, with the assistance of Cobbles and Smith, secured it to one of the projections on the wall.

"Who goes first?" asked Johnny Daw.

"Anyone. Lose no time," replied Jim.

So Johnny swung himself over, and reached the ground in safety. There he found a mere youth

awaiting him. The boy doffed his cap, but asked no questions.

Cobbles and Smith came next; then Jim, and Giuseppe last.

"I stayed," he whispered, "to see that our friend Divantes was still sleeping comfortably."

"You have not killed him, I hope?" whispered Jim.

"Senor, it was not the time for bloodshed. Besides I take no pleasure in killing an arrant fool."

He spoke a few words to the boy, who answered him in a low tone, and Giuseppe led the way towards the sea on the outside of the town.

As they avoided the streets, all save one that seemed to have been given over to decay, they met no living being.

About a mile from the town they came upon Giuseppe's boat moored close inshore. They pushed off, scrambling in as it glided into deep water. Giuseppe and the boy hoisted the sail.

There was but a light wind, nevertheless the boat started at a fair pace.

"Are they likely to give chase?" asked Jim.

"It is possible, senor," replied Giuseppe. "If so, we must do our best to avoid them. It all depends upon the priest and Captain Divantes. But they may not find my shackled lamb until the morning. If so, we may laugh at pursuit."

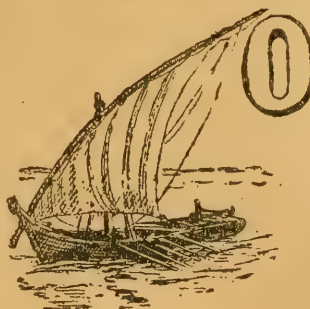
"But what of the future?" asked Johnny Daw.

"Let us get home ere we worry about that," answered Jim, gaily. "Giuseppe, once more you have paid your debt."

"I pay him in small pieces," grinned Giuseppe. "Now the senors can sleep. The boy and I can look to the boat."

CHAPTER CCV.

MORSE DISCOMPOSES A PLEASURE-PARTY.



ON the morning after Jim's departure, Rainstone, who had been set to watch from the castle-tower, reported to Morse a peculiar-looking sail approaching the island. With the help of the glass that Jim had so often used, Morse was

enabled to get a good view of the stranger.

The boat in form answered to the description given by Mr. Farrell of the vessel he had seen. It was galley-built, with a high prow, and the solitary sail square in form and striped red-and-white.

Of the occupants Morse could see little or nothing, as they sat below the high sides of the vessel, but a solitary representative stood in the prow keeping a lookout ahead, and he was at first so still that Morse thought he was a wooden figure.

But his turning round to speak to someone beneath him dispelled the illusion. He was most gorgeously attired in flowing robes that shone in the sunlight, and upon his head was a huge turban, from which the flash of jewels could be distinctly seen.

The boat travelled slowly, for she was cumbrous in build, and the sail was the very antipodes of the felucca canvas in point of usefulness. A moderate and fitful wind also helped to keep down what little pace she was capable of.

A minute after the man in the prow had spoken, half a dozen oars appeared through holes in the sides of the boat, and unseen oarsmen began to row. It was to be assumed that there were as many on the other side, and at least one man at the helm.

At the very lowest therefore the crew of the boat numbered fourteen.

Morse had no manner of doubt that these were some of the mysterious visitors who had so excited the fears of Mr. Napoleon Farrell, and as they were probably bound for the same spot, he was desirous of witnessing the result of the little preparations he had made to astonish the unsuspecting strangers.

His arrangements were not of a tragic order. They partook more of the element of comedy, as we shall see. But not knowing for certain that the original spot was their destination, he decided to take a few friends with him, and promptly called away a timber-cutting party of a dozen, among them Terry, Dawson, Dibble, and Trimmer, and told them to get their rifles. Personally he carried the Winchester repeater Dibble had presented him with.

At the pace the strange boat was approaching they had two hours to spare. It was not much more than they wanted, especially as Morse felt it would be wise to call upon the Farrells and tell them to remain close at home until they heard from him again.

Accordingly, on arriving at the chine, he left his companions for a few minutes and hastened up to the house. Mr. Farrell sat by his door reading a book, and at the same time keeping Chorker up to his work. That much-put-upon man was actually engaged at the washtub, rubbing and scrubbing linen, with the most villainous expression upon his countenance Morse had ever seen.

The ladies were inside, but Morse had not come to see them, and in a few words he made Mr. Farrell acquainted with the coming of the strange boat. That unhappy man immediately fell into a state of trembling excitement.

"Where is Gordon?" he inquired.

"He is, I am sorry to say, not on the island," replied Morse.

"Merciful Heaven! Where is he, then?"

"At Minorca. The Governor wished to see him."

"He will never return, and we are dead and done for!"

It was unintentionally the highest tribute of his faith in Jim that he could have paid the absent youth. Morse smiled, but passing it by, he said:

"If you keep close, sir, there is nothing to fear. You will warn the ladies not to stray outside the chine."

He went away, leaving Mr. Farrell to carry out his wishes, which he proceeded to do by first ordering Chorker to keep watch for the arrival of strangers, and then retired to his house, where, after some expostulation from the women, he barricaded the door.

Morse conveyed his party to a place within easy distance of the spot previously visited, and they found an excellent hiding-place behind some rocks, where they could lie at their ease and see all with little chance of being seen.

In a short time the galley-boat appeared round the nearest point of the island, and lumbered along until she was opposite the original spot. Then an anchor was lowered, and the sail taken in by some swarthy, half-naked men, who suddenly appeared from the hollow of the boat.

It was anchored close inshore, and that it was of small draught was shown by the fact that when some of the swarthy men leaped over the side they were able to find a footing with the water no higher than their armpits.

The resplendent individual who had been seen at the prow at sea now appeared again, and proved to be a dark-skinned old man with a stubbly grey beard, and features that would have warranted anyone describing him as the Missing Link.

There was an air of overwhelming dignity about him, but the general effect was ludicrous to the boys. But there was no doubt as to the quality of his apparel. It was of the best, and the gleaming of jewels, which Morse had observed before, rose from a big star of precious stones fixed on the top of his turban.

There was nobody else attired like him on board. The rest were all poorly-clad, swarthy rascals, to the number of a score or so. They all dropped down into the sea, and then the gorgeously-arrayed old man carefully lowered himself to their shoulders and was carried ashore.

Arriving there, he walked slowly to the heap of ashes and squatted down. The men divided into two parties, one going back to the boat and the other starting off in search of fuel. Fortunately, they took the opposite direction to the hiding-place of our

friends, and speedily returning with great armfuls of loose brushwood, they laid the foundation for a fire.

"I think I understand what all this means," whispered Morse. "That old man is a priest of some sect in Morocco, but he aims at forming some sect of his own. He has all the look of one of those arrogant half-madmen out of which fakirs and Mahdis spring."

The men who had gone back to the boat fished out a calf from the bottom of the vessel and dropped it into the sea, then leaped after it and guided its movements towards the shore.

As soon as it touched land they seized it by the neck and pushed it towards the old man, who, rising to his feet, gave the signal for the lighting of the fire.

It was soon flaring up, and then the old man led them round the blaze, chanting the most dismal tune ever listened to by mortal ears. This was undoubtedly a preliminary to the slaughtering of the calf.

"Hang it!" muttered Terry, "that animal would be a nice little addition to our store. Why not let fly at those fellows? If we fired over their heads we might frighten them back to their boat."

"Stop a moment," replied Morse, as he looked at his repeater; "I can assure you I am not going to allow that calf to be killed."

The men had now taken up the song in dismal chorus. Higher and higher rose the flames. The old man suddenly stopped and drew a knife from his girdle. The moment to kill the calf had arrived.

He motioned to the men in possession of it to thrust it nearer, but as they were obeying his instructions a diversion they had not looked for took place. The sand under and round the fire heaved up, and with a roar that was worthy of either "Betsy" or "Bella" at their best, a column of flame leaped straight into the air.

The old-man priest was seen to turn a complete somersault, and his followers tumbled about in every direction, yelling their loudest. Then, as they recovered their feet, they individually and collectively made for their boat.

The old man rose to his feet last, and it was seen that his turban had been blown away, and his head was as bald as an egg.

He clapped his hand to his cranium, and cast a wild glance round for his lost turban. It was not in sight.

He was too terrified to look for it. What was in his mind as to the explosion it is impossible to say, but, like his followers, his prevailing thought was to get away, and, bare-headed and quaking, he plunged into the sea.

As he waded along he called to his followers to come to his aid, but they did not show until he was close under the side of the boat, and then they lowered him a rope. He clung to it, and they hauled

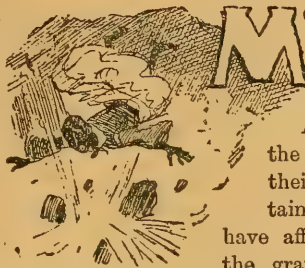
him half-way. Unable to hold on, he let go, and disappeared under the waves.

But he came up like a cork and floundered about, cursing in tones loud enough to reach the boys, who were convulsed with laughter. At last one of his followers dropped down, and put the noose of a rope under his armpits. Others on board hauled in, and he was hoisted on board in the most ignominious manner.

Inspired by a terror arising from the fact that they believed the earth had sent up her fires as a protest against their proceedings, whatever their nature might really be, the men with frantic haste raised the anchor, hoisted the sail, and put to sea.

CHAPTER CCVI.

CALF-HUNTING.—A COSTLY PRIZE.



MORSE'S expectations were surpassed. The success of his arrangements was complete.

As soon as they dared, the boys laughed aloud until their sides ached. No entertainment in a circus could have afforded them a tenth of the gratification they derived from the spectacle of the old man turning a somersault, and following it up with his ludicrous retreat.

They kept in their hiding-place until the boat had passed the point, and was lost to sight. Then came the question: "What had become of the calf?" It was not killed, for none of its remains were lying about. But nobody had seen it go.

"Look for its track upon the sands. It is bound to leave hoofmarks."

Trimmer soon found them bearing away in the direction of the chine.

"Follow it up," said Morse; "I will be with you as soon as I can."

He was going to stay behind to look for that lost turban.

Morse was not greedy, but to the victor the spoils of war are lawfully due. And he considered that he had won that turban fairly.

So when the others gleefully started off in search of the calf he soberly went to work to find the turban. He spent a full half-hour ere he discovered it wedged in between two stones fully fifty yards from the spot where it had been blown from the head of its owner.

He had no practical knowledge of the value of precious stones, but a very brief inspection of his prize convinced him that it was very valuable. The stones forming the star were of many varieties, and

all of them of exceptional size. He recognised the diamond, the ruby, the amethyst, and the topaz among others. Altogether he had reason to be satisfied save on one point. Would the owner come back for his lost treasure?

The probabilities were against the supposition, for there was no doubt that with his followers he had received a scare that ought to last him a lifetime. But men are very tenacious about their valuables, they will risk their life for a handful of jewels, and there was a possibility of the owner of the turban coming again to seek it.

Morse was resolved that he should not find it, so he tucked it under his arm, and followed on the track of his friends. He reached the chine without sighting any of them, and saw by the footmarks that they had gone on along the beach. So Morse went up the chine to relieve the Farrells of their natural apprehension.

Chorker, who had been desired to watch for an enemy, was not in sight. He had, as a matter of fact, followed the example of his master by shutting himself up.

Morse knocked at the door of Mr. Farrell's abode. Instead of getting an ordinary reply, a rifle was fired inside, and a bullet came crashing through the door. Morse felt its rush as it whizzed by, close to his head.

"Confound the fool!" he muttered. Aloud he roared: "Mr. Farrell, admit me. It is Morse."

The sound of a scuffling followed, and then the door was opened. Miss Elegantine stood there with a rifle in her hand. Behind her were Mrs. Farrell and Eveline, both very pale.

"We have taken it away from him," said Miss Elegantine. "He would fire it, although we told him that it must be one of the boys."

Morse entered. The room was half-full of powder-smoke, but it was rapidly clearing away. Mr. Farrell had vanished into one of the back rooms.

"It was a very foolish thing for him to do," said Mrs. Farrell. "But when he is frightened he is scarcely accountable for anything he does."

"The assumption that I was frightened," cried Mr. Farrell, from the inner room, "is ridiculous. The weapon is out of order, and it went off by accident."

"If the bullet had travelled an inch lower," said Morse, "it would have taken my life. I will carry the rifle back with me—to repair it."

"I protest against your doing anything of the sort," said Mr. Farrell, appearing in the doorway. "Such slight repairs as the weapon needs, I can attend to."

"I looked in, in passing," said Morse, addressing Mrs. Farrell, "to inform you that the intruders on the island have departed. I do not think they will trouble us again in a hurry."

"What have you under your arm?" asked Mr. Farrell.

"A turban one of their number left behind him."

"Permit me to inspect it."

"You can, sir; but, as they say with pictures in the public galleries, you are not to touch."

Morse held it up, exhibiting the glistening jewels. The eyes of Mr. Farrell flashed with cupidity. The women folk uttered exclamations of delight.

"As I routed the enemy," said Morse, "I consider this my lawful prize."

"You slew the man who wore it?" said Mr. Farrell, with feigned horror.

"No, sir. I merely frightened him away."

"In my position here, Morse, I think I am the right person to take charge of that article."

"I beg to differ with you, sir, and you may rest assured that it will never be given up to you."

"Supposing the owner should come back, and finding me here, demand his property?"

"Send him on to the castle, and we will talk to him. Ladies, good-day. Mr. Farrell, I cannot hold out hopes of your being again trusted with firearms."

"Morse, I insist——"

But Morse was gone, walking down the chine with a quick swinging step, fully laden with two rifles and the turban. To the cries of Mr. Farrell for him to stop or turn back, he had nothing but a deaf ear.

Too irate, and too all-round humiliated by the termination of the affair, Mr. Farrell, instead of re-entering the house, stalked up to the attached residence of Chorker. The head of that worthy was thrust out as he went by.

"Excuse me, sir," he whispered, "but I've heard everything. They have too much cheek, sir."

"That piece of news," said Mr. Farrell, "is rather stale to me."

"All the cheek, sir, is on two pairs of shoulders."

"That is news to me. What do you mean?"

Chorker came creeping out of his hut with the air of a burglar going on the prowl.

"May I be so bold, sir, as ask you to come a little further from the house?"

"I am not accustomed to such requests from inferiors, but as I am going up the chine you may accompany me."

As this was all Chorker wanted he did not demur to the manner of the assent. He followed Mr. Farrell for fifty yards or so, and there they stopped.

"Now, Chorker, let me know what you want?"

"I didn't want the ladies to hear," said Chorker, wiping his face, which was in an extraordinary heat. "As I was a-saying, sir, all the cheek is on the two pairs of shoulders that belongs to Gordon and Morse. If they could be got away you could twist the rest about like—like bits of string."

"But how are they to be got rid of if they won't go?"

"I should like to tell you first of a diskivery. I made," said Chorker.

He told the story of Jim's going down into the caverns, and that he was sure of his intention to go there again, accompanied by Morse. Indeed, he had overheard as much. Finally he came to his idea of stopping the way of return, and there he hung fire for a moment.

"Go on," said Mr. Farrell; "you have a suggestion to make."

"Well, sir," said Chorker, and now the perspiration poured down his face, "if once they got down there, *and couldn't get up again*, you would be master once more."

"What is to prevent their returning?" asked Mr. Farrell, coldly. "I do hope that you are not going to make a murderous suggestion to me?"

Chorker gasped, but found no words to reply one way or the other. He felt that he had set sail on the wrong tack.

"Of course," continued Mr. Farrell, with his eyes on the ground, "if anything happened to these rebellious boys that would enable me to resume my lawful position here, I should have no cause for regret. I see no call for me to grieve over anything that may inflict the punishment on them I feel they richly deserve. But, of course, it will not happen, for *who is to get into the castle and down into the caves to block up the way?*"

"Say as it was done by anybody so inclined," said Chorker, eyeing the bent head of his master, "there ain't no call to go into the castle."

"How is that? There is no other way."

"A way could be made, sir. There's the old entrance to the cave, sir. Blocked now. But it wouldn't be a mighty heavy job to dig through it, shoring up a way as a man could get through. Then a party so minded could lay hisself out to watch until he sees 'em go down. Then he could finish the job. I put a case as might be, sir, purwided a party was so minded."

"As, of course, nobody is," said Mr. Farrell, turning back towards his house; "but I can assure you, Chorker, that if anything happens to restore what I have lost, those who have been faithful to me in my trouble will not be forgotten."

"And I've been that, sir?"

"You have. Have you anything more to say to me?"

"Not as I knows on, sir."

"Then I will not trouble you to accompany me further."

Chorker stood watching the retreating figure, and for a time did not move or speak. Then, in a slow,

measured way the words came creeping from his lips:

"He won't have no hand in it because *he's afraid*. But he's willin' that it should be done. And the man as stands by him isn't to be forgotten. He'd better remember him if he does his work. *He'll have to do it!* I'll tread on him if he doesn't, and he's too much of a cur to show fight. To-night I starts on the job of digging a way back into the cave."

CHAPTER CCVII.

JIM GORDON GETS HOME.—THE BUILDING OF THE SHIP RESUMED.—AN INTERRUPTION.



WHEN Morse got back he found that his companions had succeeded in securing the calf, and conveying it to the castle. There Romeo had made a stall for it in the corner of the hall.

"Reckon, Marse Morse," he said, with a grin, "dat we soon hab a farmyard stock quite complete."

"What will you feed the little beggar on?" asked Morse.

"Dere lots ob widdered grass round de borders ob de wood," said Romeo, "and we got a heap ob carrots and so forf as a relish."

At present the calf could be nothing more than a pet; but anything that served to give change to their lives was of good service. Morse left Romeo putting some rough litter down for the calf for the night, and ascended to the ramparts to take a last look seaward ere he went to the Long House.

Nothing that would answer to the sail of Giuseppe's boat was in sight, and Morse joined the others in the Long House. Not more than half their number had assembled, for the workers on the ship-dock and gliding-way had not yet returned. But they soon came in, hungry as hunters, and merry as boys can be under the least provocation. There were inquiries after Jim, and some disappointment expressed that he had not returned.

"It is early days yet," remarked Morse. "The governor may prove to be a hospitable man."

But though Morse spoke thus encouragingly he was of opinion that Jim ought to have been back, for Giuseppe's boat was one of the swiftest that ever carried a single sail in those waters. Still he was not particularly apprehensive on his friend's account.

The evening passed into night, and the report from those who occasionally strolled out was, that it was a peerless sky, so full of stars "that there were very

few spaces to fill up." Terry was responsible for this description of what was truly a splendid spectacle.

Accustomed though they were to the clearest of atmospheres, it was generally conceded that never before had they looked upon anything like it. It seemed as if the very atmosphere had been dispersed, and the stars dropped down to the level of ordinary clouds.

"It is *too* fine," said Morse. "I would rather see a little more haze about. It will be blowing presently."

Dawson said the same thing, and who was there to contradict two such weather sages? Sure enough, about ten o'clock it began to blow. First of all in short, sharp gusts, then with a sustained violence that roused the wood into a deafening roaring as the huge branches swayed to and fro.

So it went on for a time, and then the door opened, and Jim, followed by his friends, came tumbling in. All greeting was drowned for a while, as the wind rushed in at their heels, and whirled up everything that was light and movable in the room.

It took three of the men, and all the boys who could get near enough to assist them, to close the door.

"It must be barricaded," said Jim, "for Giuseppe says it will blow harder before morning."

"It will blow so hard," said Giuseppe, "that a man shall turn his cheek to the wind, and behold! it is shaved. He shall turn the other, and it will be shaved also."

His expressive action made them laugh, but there were grave faces in the room, for the wind would test the soundness of the Long House.

"It will be highly inconvenient to have the roof carried away in the night," said Rainstone. "I vote we don't go to bed."

"At all events not until Jim has told us all about the hospitality of the governor," suggested Trimmer.

"The hospitality of the governor," cried Giuseppe, "is one giant *swindle*. But it may not be known to you that we are hungry."

"Had nothing to peck all day," said Johnny Daw, who was warming his hands by the fire.

With many apologies for the oversight, there was a rushing of many feet to the kitchen to rouse the negroes to their duty. But the negroes had been more thoughtful, and on hearing Jim's voice, Macbeth forthwith put some ham rashers in the frying-pan, while Hamlet and Romeo looked after matters connected with tea.

"What you want, gentlemen?" asked Macbeth of the little throng that poured into the kitchen.

"We came to help you in getting tea ready," they answered.

"As dis am de sole remain ob myself and rescen-

dants," rejoined Macbeth, with overpowering dignity. "it am only to be spected ob you dat you knock at de door afore comin' in. Likewise when you hab waited a reaserable time, and not see we sponisible folk come wif tea, den de time for you to come and make a muddle ob it."

Accepting this rebuke in a meek spirit, the enthusiastic would-be assistants retired, and in ten minutes a most acceptable meal was spread upon the board. The negroes all acted as waiters, and beyond colliding with each other every half-dozen seconds or so, maintained a dignified bearing that was an additional reproach to the intruders on the kitchen.

They listened closely to Jim's narrative of the conduct of the governor, and joined in the volume of execration that followed it.

"Now, understand me," said Jim, "I don't so much blame the governor as I do that Father Anselmo. He is evidently a man of power in the island, and has a strong will."

"While the governor," said Giuseppe, "is a baby who has lost his mother."

"Well, you got clear away," said Morse, "and I don't suppose we shall hear anything more of him."

"We did not get clear away," replied Jim, "for we had not got more than two miles at sea, when a small launch belonging to the authorities started in pursuit. I imagine that Captain Divantes succeeded in getting free of his shackles, and gave the alarm."

"Senor," said Giuseppe, "it was not your wish for me to make him *very* quiet."

"No," said Jim, "and I do not regret it, seeing that you, with your skilful handling of the boat, managed to elude the launch. We actually returned to Minorca," he added, "and set ashore the boy who had helped us so nobly. He would accept no reward, but I have promised to send him a good revolver."

"And he will consider himself ten times repaid," said Giuseppe.

"We dodged the launch, and by making a circuit would have landed unobserved, but towards evening Giuseppe seeing the signs of the coming storm, had to give up dodging and make straight for the island. As it was getting dark, the launch, hovering about, espied us. We were pursued, but once more Giuseppe's masterly management of his craft saved us, and we managed to reach the lagoon."

"And the launch?" inquired a dozen voices.

"The last we saw of the launch was her drifting helplessly—with rudder broken, I fear—and big seas breaking over her. She was but a dark outline of a boat to us, for the night had come."

"What do you think became of her?" asked Terry.

"All I can say is," replied Jim, "that she was drifting rapidly towards the shore. We could not have helped her, even if we had been disposed."

Giuseppo was of opinion that they would never see anything more of the launch or those aboard.

From this to other matters the talk drifted, while the storm raged without. About an hour after midnight it suddenly ceased. The Long House had stood the assault nobly. No damage visible from the inside had been done.

With the cessation of the storm there was an end to anxiety, and all hastened away to bed.

Morning came with a still air and a lovely sky. Over the lagoon a host of sea-gulls lightly flitted. The broad expanse of waters was calming down, but not so much as a single sail or a funnel was to be seen.

As soon as possible, the boys, with a day's rations, started off to their labours by the sea, and Giuseppo prepared to superintend the building of the boat.

As it was imperative that somebody should be left in charge of the Long House, Johnny Daw undertook that duty. So he and the three negroes were left behind. All the rest went away to assist in the boat-building. Giuseppo saw what had been done, and approved of it.

He was really a marvellous man, for, with no better drawing-board than the sands, he sketched out the dimensions of the boat, and made everything so clear to the more practical workers that they were enabled to get along at a great rate.

The gliding or launching way was not finished, but that did not hinder the laying down of the keel in the building-dock, and by noon it was done. Then came the resting from their labours for the midday meal, and as the boys lay about in the warmer corners in groups, laughing and chattering, a startling interruption occurred.

It arose from the appearance of two men on the summit of the dry-dock. One was Mr. Napoleon Farrell and the other Captain Divantes.

CHAPTER CCVIII.

"WE ARE MASTERS HERE!"—THE CAPTAIN THREATENS.



IT was not that there was anything really terrifying in either of the men; it was their unexpected appearance that took the boys aback, and, it may be said, the men also.

But a few seconds sufficed for them to recover from their surprise, and, in obedience to a sign from Jim, they all resumed their talking and paid no further attention to the intruders.

But these gentlemen were not to be denied. One was naturally overbearing and arrogant, and the other felt temporarily strong in the companionship of a man he believed to be in authority.

"May I ask," demanded Mr. Farrell, "what is going on here?"

"Mr. Farrell," replied Jim, "whatever we are doing is no concern of yours nor of the man with you. I am surprised that he has the impertinence to intrude himself upon us."

The captain twirled his moustache fiercely, and laughed harshly.

"Faith!" he said, "if my launch were not at the bottom of the sea and all my men drowned, I would make you eat your words, young sir!"

"Go home, and choke yourself with garlic," said Giuseppo, contemptuously. "It is true, as saith the proverb, that dogs live when men drown, or you would not be here yelping at us."

"I will deal with you at Minorca," returned Divantes, angrily.

"You are not there yet, my son," said Giuseppo, significantly.

The captain turned a pea-green colour about the cheeks, and addressed himself to Mr. Farrell in an undertone.

"You tell me that these are your boys, under your authority. How is it that they treat you as a puppet?"

"Pardon me," answered Mr. Farrell, "but it is you they are deriding. You told me that you had authority to arrest some of them. Do it."

"I have no power alone; and being arrested, how am I to convey them from hence?"

"That is your affair."

"You change your tone—you deceive me!"

"Have I not done enough for you?" demanded Mr. Farrell. "I find you wandering about like a half-drowned puppy, and I take you in, give you food and warmth, and at your request bring you on here, where I have observed the boys were working. Did you not tell me that they, knowing your authority, would quail before you?"

"In that matter," said the captain, giving his moustache an extra-fierce twirl, "I confess to being disappointed."

"Senor," whispered Giuseppo to Jim, "what shall I do with these two foxes? Send them off with a firebrand to their tails?"

"No, do nothing," replied Jim. "Time is up; to work again."

And, without paying any further heed to the two men above, the entire party resumed their labours.

Mr. Farrell and Captain Divantes stood for a time looking on, gloomily, sheepishly. At length the latter suggested a move.

"For, by the saints," he said, "I cannot see the fun of being treated as if we were a pair of images."

"Come away," said Mr. Farrell, "and let us confer together."

They turned away as they had stood there—unheeded—and walked on inland. After rather a long silence Mr. Farrell appeared to suddenly brighten up.

"Friend Divantes," he said, "it seems to me that all save three wretched negroes are down here. The house these boys have built for themselves must be practically deserted. Would you care to visit it?"

"Ay! a knowledge of it may be useful anon."

"They did not prohibit us. So that by-and-by we cannot be reproached for going there."

"Prohibit—reproached!" sneered the captain. "Strange words for a ruler when speaking of his subjects."

"Well—ahem!" said Mr. Farrell, "the fact is that just at this moment there is a slight divergence of opinion—on mere minor matters only—between me and the boys. And I have always made it a rule not to be—ahem!—unduly hasty in insisting upon the exercise of my authority."

"I confess, I see it."

"The English—and by that I mean British—nature requires judicious treatment, Captain Divantes. Bullying won't do. It oversteps the mark."

"And how long do you expect it will take your mild treatment to effect the rebel cure?"

"All depends."

"A year?"

"Oh, no, not so long as that."

"A month, then?"

"A month at the outside. By that time you will see the boys compliant again."

"Well, let us see the home of these pliable young fiends. Is it far to go?"

"A fairish walk. But we had better not lose an opportunity that may never occur again."

Captain Divantes scowled in a dissatisfied way, but he was eager enough to see the home of the boys, of which he had already heard a little. So the pair strode on side by side, occasionally exchanging a word, but not on the best terms with themselves or each other.

They ascended the path and came to the castle. Above was the Long House, with smoke rising from the kitchen chimney. The castle gates were closed, but Mr. Farrell suggested that they should try them.

"If we can get in," he said, "you will find it a most interesting old place, and well worth a visit."

The captain was interested already. In none of the towns of Minorca was there a castle to compare with that of Espalmador. It was even superior to the citadel of Ciudadella.

They tried the gates and found them fast. So

there was nothing to do but to go on the Long House. The gate of the stockade was open, and seated directly opposite it, with his back resting against the Long House wall, was Johnny Daw.

Across his knees lay a rifle, and his hand was upon the stock. The fact was he had seen the pair coming up the path, recognised both, and was prepared for them.

"Halt!" he cried, as they both espied him.

The captain recognised Johnny, Mr. Farrell did not.

"Who on earth are you?" the latter inquired.

"My name is Norval," replied Johnny Daw, gravely, "and on the Grampian Hills my father keeps his flocks."

"Is he not one of your boys?" inquired Divantes.

"He certainly is *not*," answered Mr. Farrell, emphatically.

"And yet he was one who came to Minorca," said Divantes; "nay, more, it was to release him that he of the name of Gordon came. Why should he be here?"

"A wrecked stranger, possibly," replied Mr. Farrell, "taking refuge with my boys as you did with me. Possibly he doesn't know who I am. Young man!"

"Sir," answered Johnny.

"I presume you do not recognise me?"

"Oh, yes, I do. You are Nap Farrell."

"Then, young man," said Mr. Farrell, with sudden anger, "you will recognise my right to enter here."

"What do you want?" asked Johnny.

"Merely for my friend here to see the arrangements of the house."

"He had better call another day, when the family are at home," said Johnny; "you, at all events, cannot enter here."

"This is passing all insolence," said the captain, as he walked through the gateway. "I would have you to know——"

A low growl came from a small hut just within the gate, which it will be remembered was built for the especial comfort of Charley, the bear, and then the bold captain received a blow in the back that knocked all the breath out of his body, and down he went, half-stunned, terrified, petrified.

"Merciful Heaven!" cried Mr. Farrell, "I had forgotten all about that brute."

And, turning tail, he was off like an Eastern runner bearing a special message for some potent Bey.

"Steady, Charley—don't kill him," said Johnny Daw, soothingly, "he isn't worth it."

But Charley had got his man down, and was not at present disposed to let him get up again.

With one huge paw he had already torn away the tails of his uniform coat, and with his mighty paws pressed the alarmed man close to the ground.

"Now, Charley," remonstrated Daw, "I am a new

friend, but you really ought to do something to oblige me. Let that muff get up. He will go away, you bet, and 'never return no more,' as the song says."

Charley answered with a low growl, and lay down at full length with his huge forefeet across Divantes's back.

"Romeo!" cried out Johnny Daw, seeing the position of the man was getting serious.

"What do you want, Marse Daw?" cried Romeo from within.

"Come here at once," replied Johnny. "A stranger is here, and Charley has got him down."

Romeo came running out, and on seeing a gorgeously-attired man lying on his stomach, with Charley keeping him there, uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Who am dis genelman?" he asked. "Gorlysmash! dat coat ob his'n want some stitchin', sure nuf."

"Get Charley off," said Daw; "don't you see he is killing that fellow with fright? The obstinate beggar won't obey me."

"Charley," said Romeo, "come off dat pusson."

Charley lolled out his tongue, but did not stir. He was evidently hugely enjoying himself.

"Dis 'pears to me," said Romeo, scratching his head, "to be a case for straddlegetic mobement."

"What the deuce do you mean by that?" asked Daw, who was getting seriously alarmed about the captain.

"It 'bout dis," said Romeo. "Charley in one of dem moods when suasion berrer than splosive langwidge. Fader, am you inside dere?"

"Me here," replied the voice of Hamlet.

"Jes' bring 'long 'bout de finest carrot you can find."

"What you want it for? Am you neber satisfied wif habin' light relishes all day?"

"You bring dat carrot," insisted Romeo, "or sumfin' happen dat make you as bald as a dry pumpkin."

After a short delay Hamlet appeared at the door with a fine specimen of the class of vegetable required in his grasp. Romeo, who had never taken his eyes off Charley, held out his hand for it.

"Who dat indiwiddle?" asked Hamlet, staring at Divantes.

He moved leisurely forward and handed the carrot to Romeo, who, in turn, put it temptingly near Charley's nose.

"Now," he said, "you come off dat pusson, or you nebbber hab dis relish or one like it as long as you lib."

Charley sniffed at the carrot, struggled against temptation, and gave way. Rising to his feet he made a snap at it. Romeo allowed him to just taste the tip, and retired slowly in the direction of the house.

"As soon as me get him inside, and de door close," he said, in a thrilling whisper, "jess ax dat pusson who had lorse his coat-tail to get cl'ar away wifout de lease arglement. Oderwise me not gib a lemon-pip for him life."

He backed into the house, followed by Charley, and the door closed. Johnny Daw bade the gallant captain get up. But he only groaned.

"Come," urged Johnny, laying hold of his arm, "get up, if you don't want to be chawed up. If that bear is let out again he will make rags of you."

Captain Divantes staggered to his feet and rolled towards the gate.

There he held on to the stockade and shook his fist at Johnny.

"What! vicious, are you?"

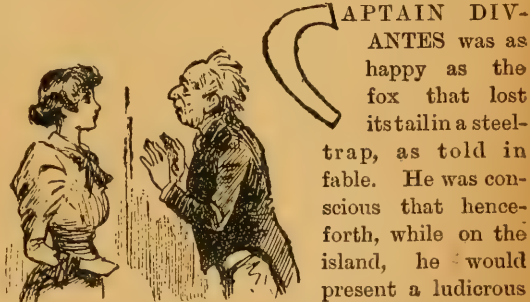
"I'll have revenge for this," said the captain, hoarsely. "I'll bring a hundred men and exterminate you! I swear it!"

"You had better cut it, if you mean to carry out your programme," advised Johnny.

With a wild gesture, expressive of impotent rage, the captain turned upon his heel and shuffled away down the path, cutting rather a sorry figure in the coat that had lost its tails for ever.

CHAPTER CCIX.

THE FOX WITHOUT A TAIL.—CHORKER AS SAPPER.



CAPTAIN DIVANTES was as happy as the fox that lost its tail in a steel-trap, as told in fable. He was conscious that henceforth, while on the island, he would present a ludicrous

appearance. And there is nothing a man so much objects to as being made to appear ridiculous.

Foreigners have an especial aversion to it, and of all foreigners this weakness is strongest in the Spaniard, for he is by nature a serious man. He will dance like a ballet-girl, but he thinks he is expounding with his legs the art of graceful bearing. He will also sing songs, but they are all about love, and more or less dolorous. There is nothing in the wide world that is such melancholy reading as a Spanish comic paper.

Therefore did the gallant captain take the loss of his coat-tails to heart. The more so because he had already seen the women folk of the house in the chine,

and was bent upon making himself agreeable, especially to Eveline.

But how was a man to make himself agreeable, in a sentimental sense, with a coat mutilated in that terrible fashion? It would not have been so bad if he brought the tails away and had them sewn on again. But alas! in his hurry he had come away without them, and all the king's horses could not drag him back to that spot again.

Thus, with a heavy heart, he wended his way back to the chine, whither Mr. Napoleon Farrell had gone before him, with a terrible tale of the captain, "whom he had vainly endeavoured to rescue," being torn to pieces by the bear.

"With my own eyes," said the veracious narrator, "I saw the skin ripped off his back. It was a horrible sight."

"Charley is always quiet enough when he pays us a visit," remarked Eveline.

"He doesn't like me, and there is always too much of the whites of his eyes to be seen when he looks at me," said Mr. Farrell. "My child, you will have to use your influence with Gordon to have the brute chained up."

"I don't know that I care for the captain," replied Eveline. "He is very vain and impertinent."

"My child," urged Mr. Farrell, "I am speaking on my own behalf. The captain is out of the question. He is dead."

As he spoke the door opened and the captain came in, with a peculiarly sneaking smile upon his face.

"Senora and senorita," he said, "I salute you."

"Save us!" exclaimed Miss Elegantine. "I thought you had been eaten by the bear."

"I succeeded in escaping from his clutches," answered the captain, sitting down with his back to the wall. "Without wishing to reproach you, Senor Farrell, I must say you played me a scurvy trick in running away."

"Sir!" exclaimed Mr. Farrell, haughtily.

"You left me to the mercies of the bear, senor."

"Not until I had exhausted myself in my efforts to rescue you. Really I think you are most ungrateful."

"Pardon, senor," said the captain, who had indeed but a hazy idea of what took place, and was not able to deny the assertion of his host, "I was not aware. The fiend brute would have made a meal of me but for my manful resistance. I was, however, assisted by a negro, who appears to be his keeper. He tempted the creature away with some sort of vegetable."

With the slightest sense of the humorous in his disposition he would not have made this admission. It let a lot of daylight into the real nature of the "struggle" that had taken place, and the ladies burst into laughter.

"Pardon me," said the captain, with offended dignity, "the jest! I do not see it."

But this remonstrance only set them off again, and a frown of displeasure on the brow of Mr. Farrell did not help matters. They laughed until their eyes were blind with tears.

"It may be," said the captain, rising, "that my presence, which inspires so much mirth, can be dispensed with for the time. I will walk abroad until the dinner-hour."

In his wrath he had forgotten all about his coat-tails, and, as he turned towards the door, the loss was espied, and the laughter rose to a scream.

He noted the change of sound and remembered. With a howl of rage he opened the door and fled.

"Caramba! Perdition!" he cried; "but I will be the more bitterly avenged for this. The senorita has laughed at me, and why? Not because I am ugly, but for my departed tails. Anathema! is a man to be judged by a torn coat? And yet what says the proverb, 'The woman who laughs at a man never loves him.' It is bitter; but I will have much blood for this!"

Then he remembered that he had no means of getting back to Minorca, and that there he would be considered lost with the launch and all on board.

He was cooped up on an island among boys who fought like men, bears who tore people's clothes, and women who made fun of him. It was worse than being sent to the galleys.

There were boats in the lagoon, he knew, but he could not manage one. Mr. Farrell had told him he could not, either, and Chorker was not to be trusted. It was a terrible plight to be in. Better have been drowned with the rest and spared this horrible humiliation.

As he growled out an additional anathema he raised his eyes upwards and saw Chorker come out of a tunnel. He was making through the sand that had fallen about the mouth of the cave.

He was a man of serious bearing, whom he could talk to, a man who was respectful and not given to ridiculing his superiors. So Divantes climbed up the slope and joined Chorker, who saluted respectfully.

"You are busy, senor," said Divantes.

"I've got through as nigh as may be, general," replied Chorker, who had bestowed this rise in rank on the captain as a sop to win his favour; "it's not quite so far as I thought, but far enough. I don't want the job again."

"I see, senor, that you prop him up," said Divantes, peering into the opening, which was about six feet high by four broad.

"Well," said Chorker, with a knowing smile, "I was bound for to do it, general. All engineers does it when sapping."

"You have a knowledge of this kind of work, senor?"

"I've took medals for it at times in my own country."

"To me," said the captain, "it seems somewhat fragile."

"It's only the look on it," said Chorker, confidently. "I know what I am up to."

He took up the pick he had laid aside for the time, and walked into the tunnel. It was about twenty feet deep. The captain followed him.

"Now," said Chorker, "you watch me. I gives a peck like this, and——"

"Diablo!" yelled the captain, as a lot of sand rained down upon him, accompanied by some of Chorker's prize shoring.

He would have retreated to the open air, but it was too late. The mouth was already blocking up, and he plunged forward against Chorker.

Their united weight completed the work of tunneling, and together they tumbled into the cave. At the same moment the entire shoring of Chorker, unequalled in its way for simplicity and idiotic fixing, gave way, and tons of earth came down, effectually cutting off their retreat.

Worse than all, Chorker had dropped his pick, and they were as helpless in the cave as the two babes were in the wood, and just as able to get out by the way they came.

"Now," said Chorker, "where are you, major?"

The officer, in his wrath, Chorker promptly reduced in rank. A curse was the reply.

"Did I not tell you the shoring was fragile?" hissed the captain, a moment later.

"You may ha' told me lots o' things," said Chorker, "but that, captain, didn't give you a right to knock it away."

"Senor, I touched it not."

"All right, sergeant," said Chorker, in his most offensive tone. "I suppose you know what this means?"

"It will entail your digging us out again," was the reply.

"What with—my finger-nails? No, corporal, I can't do that. I can tell you that we are in about the bloomingest fix as ever was. We've only got a box o' matches, and we must run the risk of sneaking out by the castle."

"What castle, senor?"

"Is their more'n one castle, Mister Full-private?" demanded Chorker, coarsely. "Why, the castle. It's a long way to it, and it's all cave, and when we get there, goodness only knows what sort o' man-traps have been set for us. Them warmint boys have got all styles of machines for blowing up and maiming, and blinding, and keeping people tight and fast."

Captain Divantes groaned.

"This," he said, "is worse than all. Would that I had never left my beloved Minorca!"

"Well, as you've got here, don't snivel, mister *Recruit*," said Chorker, "but jest give me your hand, and I thinks as I can git along arf the way without wasting matches. We shall want 'em all when we comes nigh the castle."

Divantes gave him his hand. But for their position he would as soon have thrust a dagger into his heart.

Nor was it kindness on the part of Chorker that prompted him to take the captain with him. Fear of being alone inspired him to do the charitable deed.

Down in the house of the Farrells laughter had ceased, and a late dinner was being prepared. It was the intention of Mrs. Farrell to apologise to their guest for their mirth, pleading that it was so long since they had anything to laugh at, that very little set them off. But the dinner-hour arrived and he came not.

Mr. Farrell went forth in search of him, looking into the hut of Chorker on the way. He found it empty, at which he marvelled, for Chorker was not wont to labour abroad so late, being rather given to making undertime than overtime.

Mr. Farrell professed to know nothing of the work he was doing by the cave. The women folk really knew nothing about it. Of late they had not walked that way.

The twilight lay upon the earth. The clear sky was like crystal tinged with blue. Deep shadows were gathering in the hollows of the chine.

Mr. Farrell walked as far as the cave and covertly looked up. His eyes travelling by the way the captain had climbed, he saw his footmarks in the soft, yielding soil.

Finally his gaze rested on the collapsed tunnel. Part of the truth at least, burst upon him.

"He went up to talk to Chorker," muttered Mr. Farrell, "and entered it. The old fool knows as much about tunnelling as he does of building an ironclad. Something went wrong and the whole thing's collapsed. Really, I don't see that it is my affair. I am a poor hand at digging—I was not built for manual labour."

So he turned back home and reported that he could find nobody in the chine—not even Chorker. He expected he had been lured away by the angry captain, and having waited full time, asked for dinner to be served.

"The man has gone off in a huff," said Mr. Farrell, "and has induced Chorker to go with him. I wish them joy of each other's company."

"Chorker is worse than useless," remarked Mrs. Farrell.

"I quite agree with you my, dear," said Mr. Farrell,

"and the captain is a puppy. We shall be happier without either. I never saw anything more ludicrous than his coat deprived of its tails."

This set them all laughing in concert, and the dinner went off merrily.

CHAPTER CCX.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN INTO THE FIRE.



JOHNNY DAW'S report of the visitors he had received that day excited much hilarity among the boys, but in the breasts of the leaders it roused a feeling of exasperation.

"It just shows the lengths that Farrell will go to if he thinks he can do anything safely," said Jim. "Now suppose we had left the Long House unprotected, as we might have done, a nice lot of rummaging there would have been with that confounded pair."

"We shall have to speak very plainly to him," said Morse. "It is no use mincing matters. If he comes here without leave, he will be treated as a common enemy."

"I suppose he thinks he has got hold of a big Spanish gun," said Martin.

"Poof!" ejaculated Giuseppe, "that Divantes is nothing. A waiting puppy-dog. I'd let him go back and do his worst."

"I think he will be better gone," remarked Jim; "the Farrells do not want to be bothered with a fellow like that."

"Suppose you go over in the morning," suggested Morse, "and put the thing squarely to Farrell?"

"I'll do it if I have time," said Jim.

The subject was dismissed, and the building of the boat became the theme of conversation. Giuseppe entered into details as to the size of the sail, for he would only venture on a big felucca, although there was to be a cabin for shelter to it. Into these details we need not at present go.

Morse stole away to spend an hour in his favourite laboratory, but he was not going to make a late night of it. He promised Jim that he would be back by ten o'clock, and shortly before that hour he shut up a book he was reading, and having extinguished the light, descended in the dark.

He knew his way so well that he travelled unfalteringly as far as the courtyard, where it was lighter, as

the moon had not yet gone down. It was a young moon, but in the clear air it gave more light than one would expect.

The door of the great hall was open, and he passed in. As a rule, it was not locked now, but it occurred to him—he could not have said why—that it would be better to make it fast.

Accordingly he turned the key and put it into his pocket. Then he passed on, and by the covered way rejoined his friends as they were getting ready for retiring.

Little did he think that he left two men behind him who were in the hall lying under the big table as he groped his way through. They were Chorker and his companion, who narrowly escaped being found out. They were about entering the courtyard, when they saw Morse appear at the other side, and retreated just in time.

After he was gone the quaking pair lay close, and when all was still Captain Divantes gave utterance to a smothered groan.

"What's the matter with you, you tinpot militia-man?" demanded Chorker.

"What will they say when they find us here?" asked Divantes.

"I don't know," snarled Chorker. "There niver was sich luck. Come out and let us see if we can get away from this place. I reckon they've made a back way to the castle, and we may get out by it."

Now the hall was very dark, and Chorker could not see before him more than a few inches, and then only dimly. If he was aware of the fowls being there he had forgotten them.

They were all asleep on their perches, which Romeo, with the aid of his father and grandfather, had fixed up in the corners. The work of fixing was of the most primitive description, the ideas of the whole three as to the art of building being very limited.

They put up the perches and knocked in nails between the stones for them to rest on. As for testing what they would bear, not one of the three thought of it.

The fact was that these perches would just bear the weight of the fowls and no more. Therefore when Chorker, groping about in the dark, knocked his head against one of them, he brought it down with a run.

A shower of Minorca hens and roosters rained down upon him. Disturbed in their sleep, they were terrified, and gave vent to cries of alarm.

Now a Minorca fowl has an especial vocal power of its own. When scared it utters the cry "corca" with a special shrillness, and it will go on making a most unearthly row as long as there is a puff of breath left in its feathered body.

Staggered beyond all power of description, Chorker tumbled back and upset the equally terrified captain.

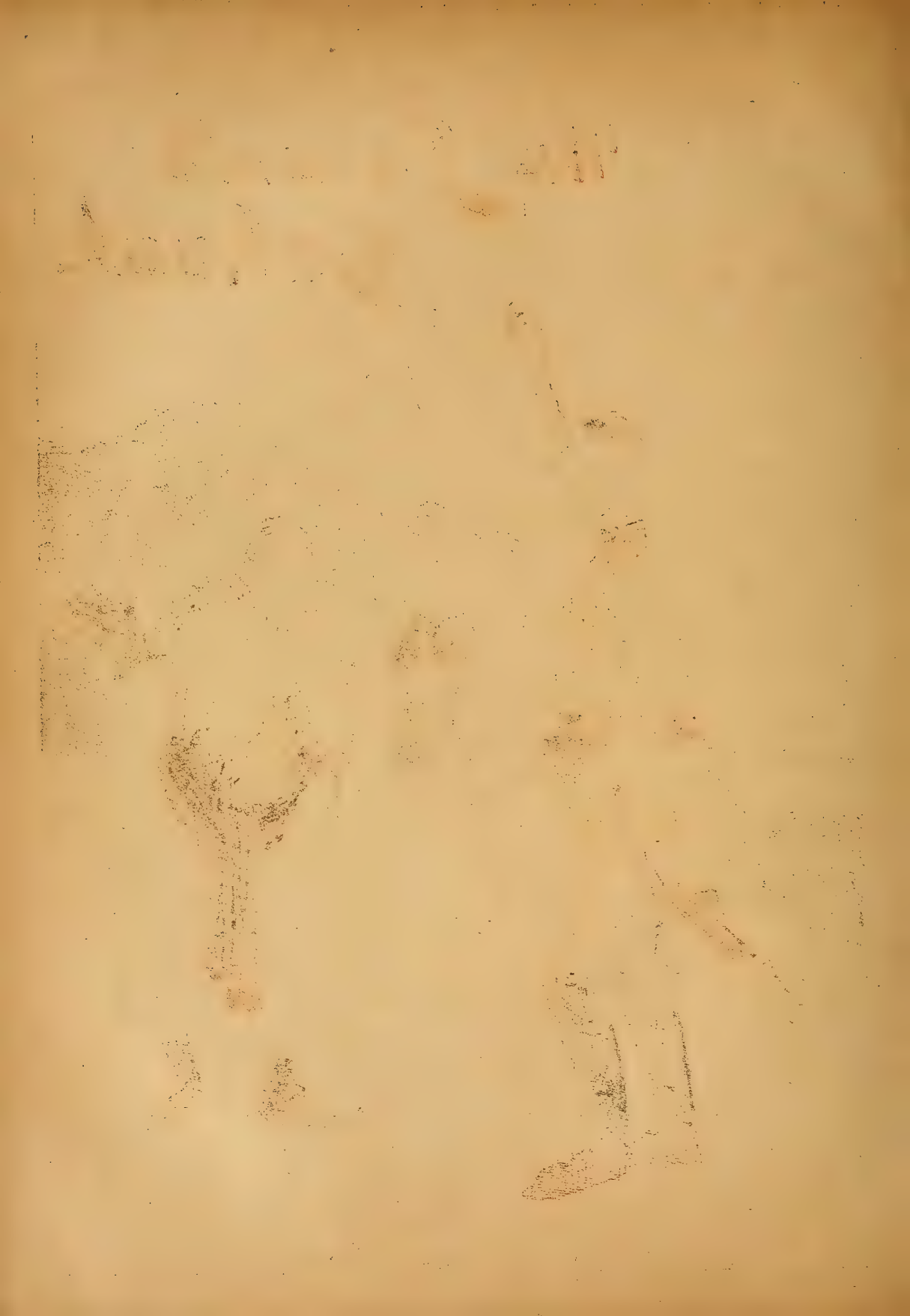
AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.

The Island School.



"There a'n't no cause to be afeard o' me so long as you behaves decent." It must have been the tone of his voice that led the Missing Link to rise and stand meekly before the mighty Chorker.



Neither of them thought of fowls for a moment, but believed that something fiendish had fallen upon them in the dark. As they lay there a light flashed from the old kitchen passage, and the voice of Romeo was heard.

"What come to dem fowls now? Am it a fox or a wolf? Now, you two ole people, don't hang back, but come and do your duty."

The familiar voice of Romeo recalled the scattered wits of Chorker, and he climbed upon his feet.

"Get up, you—you *deserter*!" he hoarsely whispered to his companion, "unless you want to be shot."

The captain got up hastily from the ground, and Chorker dragged him into the old laboratory and pushed him behind the door.

"Lie down and hold your werry breath," growled Chorker.

So there they lay, holding their very breath, and in a few moments Romeo's voice was again heard.

"Now dis," he said, "'bout what me 'spect to happen. Didn't me tell you so at de time you was helpin' me put up de perks?"

"You tell me?" Hamlet was heard to exclaim.

Then Macbeth broke in, apparently from the rear.

"You knock de nails in, Romeo."

"What ob dat?" demanded Romeo. "*Who held de perk while me did it?* Call back de facs. Dere was you standin' on a stool, holdin' up de pole or perk, and what me say to you, fader? Was it not, 'Put him 'arf a inch more dis way?' Den what say you but dis, 'No, Romeo, anoder 'arf-inch and dat perk not stan' up a week'?"

"It no use you two boys argleyfying," said Macbeth, "de perk am down, an' de cause ob it am weiled in 'seurity. My 'pinion am dat you feed dem blessed fowls too much, Romeo. So long as dey was kep' under, de perk was right, but habin' laid on flesh dey break it down."

"Mose ob 'em settle in de corners now, and der nuffin' to be done but to leab 'em till de mornin'. I——"

Romeo pulled up short, for at that moment he happened to be looking at the door behind which Chorker and his companion were hiding.

That door was a rough affair, put up to temporarily replace the one that had been broken. There was a considerable gap between it and the post, the hinges being an odd pair larger than was necessary.

It was by this opening that Chorker incautiously placed his eye, and the gleam of it was seen by Romeo, who held a lantern in his hand.

The effect upon Romeo was that of rapid petrification. He knew no more what to make of that eye than he would have done had it suddenly appeared overhead in the ceiling.

He stood still staring at it, while his two relatives

in their turn regarded him with unlimited astonishment.

"What's come to de chile?" murmured Macbeth.

"Boy," cried Hamlet, "what you done wif you fackleters?"

Romeo by this time had recovered slightly, and, with a brightening of his wits, he was able to see that the eye was associated with a forehead, and some rough hair above it. From this he deduced that somebody was in hiding behind the door.

"Scuse me, you ole people," he said, with a gasp, "but for a moment me was defectin'."

"You allus defectin' on tings dat not propriate to de season," remarked his grandfather, sternly; "it's a waste ob time for you to do it."

"Well, den," said Romeo, "waste no more here, but jess git outside and 'long home."

Nothing loth, the two elder niggers backed out of the hall, and Romeo followed them. The instant they were outside he signalled for them to stop.

"What am he defecting on now?" asked Hamlet.

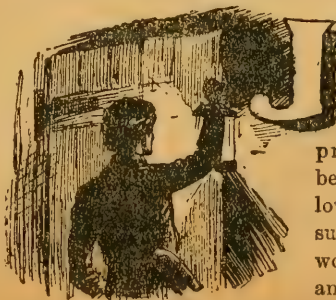
"Go for Marse Gordon," whispered Romeo, in his ear, "and tell him to come 'long sharp wif him Winklecher depeater, also Marse Morse. Dere some-borry behine de door ob de labbeterry."

This was a sufficiently startling piece of news to send the two elders off smartly on their errand. They did not pause a moment to inquire into particulars, or to argue the matter with Romeo. He remained behind, and, to keep the hiding party from coming out, hummed a tune, and mixed it up with musing aloud.

"Spec dis place hab to be tidied up to-morrow—tidy tum tum de!—dere allus a lot of work to do here dat am de result ob oder pussons' laziness—riddledy ree!—a-working at de cotton-mill, a turn-in' ob de wheel—now, who spec to see sich a lot ob rubbish here? Dis corner wuss dan any dustheap, me eber set eyes on." Then, under his breath, "Here, come Marse Gordon. Hoop de dooden do. He see who got dat eye in him head."

CHAPTER CCXI.

GORDON PUTS IT STRAIGHT TO CAPTAIN DIVANTES.



IM was accompanied by Morse and Martin. Macbeth and Hamlet prudently remained behind, not being in love with scrimmages, such as they feared would take place. Jim and Morse had their

repeaters. Martin carried a big hammer.

"What is this I hear, Romeo?" asked Jim.

"It true nuff," whispered Romeo, "someborry behine dat door, and it was dem as bring down de fowl-perk, you bet, Marse Gordon."

"Come along," said Jim, "let us find out who it is. Hold the lantern, Romeo, so that we can see."

Jim and his friends went in advance, and Romeo followed close behind, holding the lantern high so that they could see where they were going. Arriving at the doorway, Jim challenged the two skulkers.

"Whoever is hiding there," he said, "come out and give yourselves up."

"Jess what I was a-thinking of doing, Mister Gordon," replied Chorker, with assumed cheerfulness. "Now then, you drummed-out private, get up and show yourself."

The appearance of the pair excited considerable astonishment in the breasts of all the spectators, for they were certainly the two last persons they would have expected to see.

Chorker assumed a buoyancy he did not feel, but the captain presented the appearance of a cockatoo which has been shaken in a bag.

"Here we are, Mister Gordon," resumed Chorker, "and glad we are to find ourselves among friends."

"Captain Divantes," said Jim, ignoring Chorker for the moment, "I suppose you are aware you are intruding?"

"It is not my doing," answered the Spaniard, sullenly, "this old fool——"

"Fool yourself, and wuss!" hissed Chorker.

"Will you be quiet?" said Jim, sternly. "Romeo, if he speaks again, gag him. Now, Captain Divantes, I shall be glad to learn how it is that we are honoured with this visit?"

"It is thus," said the captain. "To-night I walk in the chine, and I see yonder worm tunnelling a hole into a cave"—Jim turned upon Chorker, who shrank from his gaze. "I weakly enter, and as he breaks through, behold, the miserable shoring he put up gives way, and all the earth descends. To escape being buried alive, we push forward into the cave. From thence he brought me on here. We hoped to escape unperceived, but yonder door was locked."

"By me," said Morse. "I had a curious feeling that prompted me to do it."

"So you were tunnelling into the cave," said Jim to Chorker, "with what object?"

"I don't know as I'd any hobject," replied Chorker, wretchedly; "time hung heavy on my hands in the chine. I wanted something to do."

"You liar!" growled Martin. "I like the idea of your working because time was heavy on your hands."

"Let him be," said Jim; "he had no good motive, you may be sure. Perhaps we may find a way of getting something of the truth out of him."

"It was Mister Farrell as said as I was to do it," replied Chorker, "that is all I know. I'm allus gettin' inter trouble for other people."

"Captain Divantes," said Jim, "I must ask you to come with me. It is clear that we must come to some understanding."

The captain bowed. He felt humiliated at being talked to in that peremptory way by a boy, but he was helpless. Turning to Martin, Jim bade him bring Chorker along.

"I leave you and the rest to deal with him," he said. "Morse, you will come with me."

Leading the way back, Jim returned to the Long House, which was attained by a number of steps that led to one of the back rooms of the building.

It was here that Jim halted, and bade Martin go on with his prisoner.

"Do not let me see him again," he said.

Morse remained with Jim and the captain. Romeo hung the lantern on a hook in the rafters, ere he followed Martin and Chorker.

There were no seats in the room, nothing but a rough table, on a corner of which Jim sat, and addressed the captain.

"When I was at Minorea," he said, "I experienced some scurvy treatment from you; were I of a revengeful disposition, I might now square accounts with you. How easy it would be to shoot and bury you, and never a word heard of it by your friends!"

"But you will not do it," pleaded the captain, licking his dry lips.

"No, you are right so far," rejoined Jim. "We are not murderers here. All we want is to be let alone. Now, understand me, this is our territory, and we will have no intruders here."

"It was not my intention to be near you again. It was that idiot who caused me to come."

"You know nothing of his reason for tunnelling into the cave?"

"Nothing. It was a revelation to me to find him at work upon it."

The evident truthfulness of the reply stopped all questions in that direction. Jim was about to proceed, when a loud shouting came from the principal room. Above it, the voice of Chorker was heard roaring for mercy. The gallant captain turned pale.

The roaring passed out of the house into the open ground of the stockade. Mingled with it was a sound like mild carpet-beating. Louder than all were Chorker's appeals for mercy.

But these sounds soon ceased, for Chorker was evidently driven out, and beat a speedy retreat.

Then the boys came laughing back, and soon only the hum of their voices was heard.

"Am I to be subjected to this treatment, whatever it may have been?" asked the captain.

"No," replied Jim. "I reckon they have rope's-ended the old skunk out of the place. You will be allowed to retire unhurt. I merely wish to say that here on this island we will brook no interference from you or your friends in Minorca. If you should ever get back there, let this be clearly understood. This island is *leased* to us, or to Mr. Farrell, which is practically the same thing, and until that lease terminates, *the island is ours*. All persons landing here without our authority will be treated as hostile strangers. You understand?"

The captain bowed. His one anxiety was to get away from a place where boys were so free with rope's-ends.

"I will now take you to the gate," said Jim, "and I trust you will have the good sense not to come near us again."

"One moment—pardon," said the captain. "There is a bear——"

"I will see that it does not harm you," said Jim. "Do not be afraid."

"It is not fear," answered the captain, with a quivering lip, "but one cannot go about if the brute removes more of my attire."

His hearers smiled, and Jim, once more urging him not to fear, invited him to hasten to the gate.

They had to pass through the chief room where the boys had recently foregathered to administer chastisement to Chorker. It was almost empty, and the few who were there seemingly paid no heed to the captain, as he and Jim passed through.

Charley was in his hut, and he came out as Jim emerged from the house. Divantes, with a gasp, retreated a step.

"I assure you," said Jim, "there is nothing to fear."

He motioned to Charley to retire, and the animal obeyed him, after casting one sidelong glance at the shrinking Spaniard. The gate was open.

"You know your way," said Jim, "and the moon will not go down for an hour."

"May I ask for the gate to be closed," said the captain, tremulously.

"It is always closed at night," answered Jim, and as he spoke he pulled it to. Before he could secure it, Captain Divantes was half-way down the path, travelling at a smart trot with the fear of Charley for a stimulus.

Jim returned to the chief room, where only Martin remained.

"They punished Chorker?" he said, inquiringly.

"He will sit down with extreme caution for a week to come," replied Martin.

"And serve him sight," said Jim. "There is more in that tunnelling than is at present clear to me, but I can't worry about now. Good-night, Martin."

"Good-night, sir!"

Ten minutes later the Long House was still and dark from end to end.

CHAPTER CCXII.

WHEN THE SPRING CAME.



BRIEFLY let us tell what became of the pair of worthies soignominiously dismissed from the Long House.

Neither was inclined to return to the house in the chine; Chorker, because the life was a dreary one, and, having failed in his plan for the extermination of Jim Gordon and the more important of his friends, he felt that Mr. Farrell would be harder on him than ever. The captain did not care to return because he had been laughed at, and would be laughed at still more if the story of his adventures that night became known.

The thought that Eveline would get a fund of amusement out of his misfortunes was gall to him. But what was he to do?

As he proceeded rapidly down the path, travelling much faster than Chorker had done, for reasons that will be obvious to the perceptive reader, he overlooked that worthy on the level below.

"Friend," said Divantes, "they have not treated you well?"

"Are they not fiends?" cried Chorker. "Sich knots niver was tied in rope afore. I say, sergeant, what do you think of doing?"

"I cannot return thither." The captain jerked his thumb towards the chine.

"I've no stomach for it either," said Chorker. "Now, if you've a mind to, we might try our luck in a small boat by putting off early in the morning."

"With what object?"

"We might fall in with a boat going to Minorca, or one that would drop us there," returned Chorker.

"Get me there," said the captain, eagerly, "and I am your friend for life."

"You'll do summat for me there, captain?" said Chorker. He was rapidly reinstating the officer in his high position.

"I will do much for you—everything," said Divantes, warmly. "Am I not related to his excellency, and ruler of his household? My word is law there. Ah! we have fine times in the citadel. Nothing but smoking and dancing and singing all the day long."

"I could git along with a lot of that," said Chorker.

"Now you trust me in one of these small boats, and we'll git to Minorca safe enough. I daresay as we shall find a pair of oars somewheres lying around. All we'll do to-night is to pull up to the mouth of the lagoon and git an hour's sleep there. As soon as it is grey in the morning we'll put to sea. I reckon we are bound to fall in with a boat."

"And what story are we to tell?"

"The story of the sinking of your launch," said Chorker. "No lies for me; I can't abear 'em."

Divantes had a horror of the sea after his recent experiences, but he had a still greater horror of the island, so he assented.

Chorker, for once, had estimated things correctly. He found a pair of oars—boats there were we know—and in one of the smallest he pulled to the mouth of the lagoon. There they slept until the day came, when they put out to sea, and by wondrous good fortune fell in with a trader.

A signal of distress was hoisted, they were taken on board, and Divantes told a story of wrecking, and was believed. So they were taken on to Minorca, and for a time we part from them.

Meanwhile both were believed by Mr. Farrell to be dead, until three days later, when Jim went over to the chine on a visit.

There he told the story of the finding of the pair in the hall, and of their dismissal. It amused the women-folk mightily; but Mr. Farrell apparently saw no fun in it.

After Jim was gone, he showed what was on his mind.

"That is his story," he said; "but we shall never see those men again."

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Farrell.

"Because the boys have murdered them."

"Nonsense!"

"Nonsense as much as you like," insisted Mr. Farrell, "but I am as certain of it as if I saw it done."

As it was useless to argue with him, they allowed the matter to drop.

The building of the boat went on briskly for a whole month, during which time nothing of any serious moment occurred. The hull of the craft was finished, and it was proposed by Giuseppe to launch her and anchor close inshore, where her fittings could be attended to.

"That done, senor," he said to Jim, "I shall pay a night visit to Minorca, to see how things are going on there. It is time there were more mail-bags."

"But they won't be delivered to us," remarked Jim, with a grimace.

"We shall see, senor," said Giuseppe.

"And when can the boat be launched?"

"The sooner the better, senor—to-morrow."

"We must make a holiday of it. I shall send over and invite the Farrells."

Jim made this remark to Morse, who was with him; and Giuseppe stood by the bow of the boat, looking over her proportions.

The day's work was done, and the toilers were putting their tools together.

"Let them come, by all means," said Morse, "and Eveline shall christen the boat with a bottle of that good old wine we have in the cellars."

"A good idea, Morse."

"The better the wine, senors," said Giuseppe, "the better the boat. Christen a craft with poor stuff, and, by my faith, she will never sail more than at a snail's pace."

"This boat ought to get along," mused Jim.

"Senor, she will *run* over the sea if she has her fill of canvas; which reminds me, senor, that we have not yet made the sail."

"There is no end of canvas for you," said Morse. "It was brought from the 'Guadalquivir.'"

"We lack nothing," replied Jim. "And now for home."

It was a glorious evening in early spring, and all their hopes were high as they went gaily homeward.

Suddenly Giuseppe burst into song, in so sweet a tone that every voice was hushed. Hitherto he had never breathed a word of this accomplishment; but he was assuredly an artist.

He afterwards named the song:

"OH! LIGHT OF EVENING.

"Down in the west, the light decaying,
Like joy, looks loveliest ere it dies.
On Ocean's breast the small waves, playing,
Catch the last lustre as they rise.

"Scarce the blue curling wave displaces
One pebble in its gentle ebb;
Scarce on the smooth sand leaves its traces
In meshes fine as fairy's web.

"This is the hour the loved are dearest,
This is the hour the severed meet;
The dead—the distant now are dearest,
And joy is full, and sorrow sweet."

"A good song, Giuseppe," said Jim, "but it makes me rather sad."

"All really good music saddens," replied Giuseppe; "but it is a sorrow we are all better for. The senor was thinking of friends at home."

"You've hit it," said Jim; and Giuseppe smiled.

"It is as well to remember those at home," he said, "but I have few to remember. Let us hasten, senor, for singing makes me hungry."

A question arose as to the advisability of sending to the Farrells that night; but it ended in a decision that the morrow early would do, and Romeo was appointed to convey the message before breakfast.

"Tell them," said Jim, "that at twelve o'clock we launch the good ship 'Condor,' and luncheon will be provided on the ground. You may privately hint to

Mr. Farrell that the ship will be christened and its health drunk in some of that good old wine. If that doesn't bring him along, nothing will."

CHAPTER CCXIII.

THE LAUNCHING OF THE "CONDOR."



FOR once," said Jim, "the Long House must be left to take care of itself, for all must be at the launching to-day."

There was no apparent reason why it should not be done. No known strangers were on the island.

The course taken by Chorker and Divantes had been guessed at when a boat was found to be missing. Had they remained upon the island skulking around, they would never have dared to intrude there after their unpleasant experiences.

All but Charley must go, for the launching of the "Condor" was no common event.

She was seventy feet long, fourteen in the beam, and thirty tons burden as near as could be reckoned. Her designer was a man who drew most of his plans on the sands, and her builders were mainly boys. It was a triumphant bit of work so far, and they had a right to be proud of it.

Twelve bottles of that wondrous old wine were put into a box for transport, for all were to taste it and drink to the "Condor."

Of provisions there were no lack, and at ten o'clock all were ready to start.

Giuseppo, as master of the ceremonies, led the way, and close behind him came the three negroes, each drawing a sledge laden with good things.

The loading up of these sledges had not been accomplished without much artful dodging on the part of the darkies, shifting in secret the heavier parcels to other sledges than their own; but it ended in Macbeth having at least half as much again to draw as Hamlet, and twice as much as Romeo.

"Pears to me," said the old man, as he toiled along behind his descendants, "dat eider dey got dere muscle up, or not a full share ob de lumber to haul."

But it was too late to remedy matters, and Macbeth stored up his feeling of wrong for future ebullition.

Still it *was* hard, for although he was fairly tough, he was not so strong as either of the others.

At length a happy idea struck him, and, putting on a spurt, he slipped the end of his drawing rope under the binding rope of Hamlet's sledge. They were

going down a slope at the time, and Hamlet did not find any difference until he got upon the level. Even then he did not guess the truth, but fancying that there must be a rise, pulled his very heart out to get over the ground.

The unqualified delight this spectacle afforded those following up behind need hardly be named.

Meanwhile, Romeo forged on ahead, and was spared a similar trick being played upon him, provided, of course, Hamlet had thought of it.

As they drew near the dock, Macbeth took advantage of another slope to detach his rope and resume his labours. Hamlet pulled up half-dead, while the old nigger was as fresh as a daisy. Romeo was also fairly comfortable, and regarded the sweat-bedewed countenance of his father with amazement.

"Pears to me," he said, "dat you been kind ob oberdoing it."

Hamlet burst out, wrathfully declaring that his load was three times the weight of either of the others. Macbeth thereupon proceeded to unload and pile up his lot, and Martin was called in as judge. He gravely declared Macbeth's sledge to have been by far the heaviest laden.

Romeo knew that, for he had put it on his grandfather, and there was the old man, quite fresh, without having turned a hair.

"Clar to goodness!" he muttered, "if de old man ain't gone back to him second prime."

Hamlet was also puzzled, yet suspicious, but there was no time to look into the matter, for it was near noon, and there was the luncheon to lay out in a convenient place before the launching.

Two temporary masts were fixed in the "Condor," and a rope, starting in the bow, run over them to the stern. This was covered with a coloured bunting, and the effect was quite gay.

"Really, it is wonderful!"

It was Miss Elegantine who had come up with Eveline and uttered this exclamation. Mr. and Mrs. Farrell were not far behind, and the husband was in a very gracious mood. He had that good old wine in his mind's eye. Not that the man was given to taking more than was good for him, but, in common with thousands, a glass of good wine was a boon to him.

Giuseppo was engaged in hanging a bottle of it from a stick projecting from the bow as he came up.

"What is that for?" asked Mr. Farrell.

"To christen the boat with, senor."

"Merciful goodness, what a waste!"

Giuseppo explained the need of good wine, but Mr. Farrell was not converted.

"Muddy water would do as well," he said.

Jim asked Eveline if she would christen the boat by breaking the bottle against the bow and naming her.

"It is nothing," he said; "you set the bottle swing-

ing until it strikes the boat and breaks. Then you say, 'I christen thee the 'Condor,' and the shorings being knocked away, off she goes."

"If you are at all timid, my dear," said Miss Elegantine, "I shall be glad to perform the office."

Eveline looked at Jim and saw the look of distaste that was in his eyes. Miss Elegantine christening the boat—oh, horror!!

"I am not afraid," said Eveline; "indeed, I shall be glad to do it."

All the youngsters, with the exception of Jim and Morse, were now climbing into the boat.

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Miss Elegantine, "I never saw such boys, climbing about in that mad way."

"They are going with the boat," explained Jim; "a little extra weight will help her down the way."

"But suppose the boat should overturn?" said Miss Elegantine.

"Overturn?"

"Yes, and shoot them all out on the ground."

"Some of them will get hurt."

"And if it upsets in the sea?"

"Perhaps some be drowned."

"Oscar!" screamed Miss Elegantine, "come out this instant."

Dibble, who was sitting astride the bow as if he were a figure-head, took off his cap and waved it.

"I'm all right, auntie!" he said.

"But I insist on your coming off."

"I can't. I'm glued on here. It's part of the ceremony."

"Oh, is he glued?" cried Miss Elegantine, amid roars of laughter. "Pull him off—do. If anything happens to him, I shall be blamed."

"Now, Eveline," whispered Jim, "one, two, three, and away!"

"Good wine—the best in the world!" groaned Mr. Farrell.

"Oscar!" screamed Miss Elegantine, "for the last time, will you come off?"

Eveline swung the bottle as directed, and dashed it against the boat.

"I christen thee the 'Condor'!" she cried.

"Stand clear, there!" shouted Martin and the rest of the men.

Half a dozen blows knocked away the shorings, and the "Condor" began to move down the well-greased way. The boys shouted and hurraed.

A slight lurch to the left of the "Condor" sent Miss Elegantine to the ground flop, and there she remained limp with terror.

But the boat righted herself, and gathering momentum, rushed into the sea.

A long rope trailing over the stern was seized by the men and twisted round a post already driven into the ground. It strained with the weight of the boat,

but it did not break, and the next moment the "Condor" rode lightly, twenty yards from shore.

The launch was a complete and unqualified success.

Nothing had been forgotten. A boat was there to take the boys off, and there was some scrambling to get ashore first, that led to Terry and Trimmer falling into the sea.

But it was not deep there, and with no more harm than a wetting to the waist, they came merrily to land.

"Unless I had seen it with my own eyes," said Miss Elegantine, "I never could have believed it could be done."

CHAPTER CCXIV.

FARRELL AS TOASTMASTER.—AN IMPOSTOR PUNISHED.



IT would be beyond the bounds of truth if we asserted that the "Condor" was a model-built boat as far as workmanship was concerned. She was nothing of the sort.

All we claim for her is that she was modelled on correct lines. Giuseppe knew what he was about, but his workmen, both boys and men, were novices in the art. An experienced boat-builder at home would have sniffed contemptuously as he regarded the "Condor" lying off shore, waiting to be completed.

In addition to the rope which held her to the shore, one of the spare anchors of the lost steam-launch was lowered on the sea-side, so as to keep her from being blown ashore.

The luncheon was a great success. Now that the winter was past and gone, the spring air was soft and pleasant. The sun, as yet, was not too hot, and they could bask in his rays without fear of ill results.

Mr. Farrell assumed the position of the giver of the feast, and that small position he was allowed to occupy without opposition.

Seated on a convenient stone, nicely rounded off on the top, he drank the good old wine, and it warmed him through and through. All that was ill in the past seemed to have been forgotten, and he lived only in the present.

As head of the table, if the irregular mass of men, and boys squatted about the sands can so be called, he proposed a series of toasts. First of all the "Condor."

Pointedly addressing Giuseppe, he congratulated him as an exponent of one "of the noblest arts cultivated by man."

"Crude, she may be," he said; "but the line of

beauty is there. She will walk the waters like a thing of life. Your country ought to be proud of you."

Giuseppe received this bucketful of praise in a modest spirit, merely remarking that, "he did his best for the boys, who had been so noble to him."

Next, Mr. Farrell proposed the ladies' health, enlarging on the merits of the trio of the sex that sat near him. It was astounding what virtues he had recently found in his wife and daughter. Miss Elegantine also received her share of the praise.

"She is a woman," said Mr. Farrell, regarding her with a mellow eye, "who has failed in her mission because she has not consented to make some man happy."

To which Miss Elegantine, with a sweet smile, responded:

"Get away with your nonsense—do."

But the cream of the toasts came when Mr. Farrell proposed "My Boys."

He had, in a way, prepared them for almost anything, but the effect of his eulogistic remarks on their goodness, obedience, and undoubted ability, fairly staggered the toughest of them.

No doubt, the wine being of a soothing and disposition-sweetening nature, helped him to look at things through a rose-coloured glass, but there must have been something in his own nature out of the common lot of men to lead him, as Terry remarked, "to so diabolically commit himself."

"Little did I think," said Mr. Farrell, fairly beaming, "when I started the school that I should be so blessed as I have been with my pupils. You are the pick of the nation, boys. You have been my comfort and my stay. You have fought and annihilated my enemies, and now, when I have so great a need of rest, you build me a home where I can recuperate my health in comfort and peace. The tie between us is no ordinary one. It is a chain of affection with riveted links."

Then he emptied his glass, and Mrs. Farrell arose.

"Nap," she said, "it is time to go."

"Do you think so?" he inquired, tenderly.

"Yes, dear," added Eveline.

"I have yet another toast——"

"No more wine, sir," said Jim, as he got upon his feet. "There is not much of it at the castle, but we thought we could spare a dozen bottles to day. The rest will be saved for sickness."

"Gordon, my brave lad," said Mr. Farrell, grasping his hand, "if I had a son, I would wish him to be like you. So there is no more wine?"

"Not a drop, sir."

"Then good-bye, all. My dear, I am ready."

Only general adieus could be taken, owing to the number assembled. The boys sprang up and gave a cheer, intended mainly for Eveline, but Mr. Farrell

appropriated it, and doffing his hat, bowed as Napoleon might have done to his troops after a great victory.

Then he gave his arm to Miss Farrell, and strode away, with the step of a ruler of men. He was not intoxicated, but merely ripened by wine that was as old as any, if not the oldest, in the world.

Miss Elegantine, who had also paid some slight attention to the cheering wine, bore herself with a dignified grace, that tried the risible muscles of some of those she left behind her. But they were too good-mannered to laugh.

"I am glad Nap is gone," said Terry, with a sigh of relief. "As it was, I had to unbutton my waistcoat to keep from bursting."

"He means what he says for the time," said Martin. "He is certainly a most extraordinary man."

"And so say all of us," sang Trimmer.

Of remnants of the feast there was little to gather. The empty bottles were cast far out to sea, and one of the sledges was lightly laden for home.

There was no cause for dodging in loading them up but Macbeth had now to pay the penalty for his early imposture.

"Grandfader," said, Romeo, rolling his eyes, "make nuffin ob takin home de leavings. Neber was dere sich a worreful old man."

Grandfather was not exactly disposed to take the entire load upon himself, but he had a reputation to keep up, and he accepted the task.

But light as it was, it was almost too much for him at the very start, and ere he had travelled half a mile his eyes began to bulge out of his head.

Unluckily for him, the boys had gone on. So had the men, and he had no other companions than his son and grandson.

Hamlet, having by this time concluded that he had been the victim of the old man's early trickery, was not disposed to be merciful. Romeo looked upon his grandfather as fair sport at all times.

"Dere neber was sich a worreful ole man," he said, again and again. "He jest makes nuffin ob it."

"He 'bout as strong as eber he was," said Hamlet, "and stronger. If dere was twice dat load he make a bag ob feeders ob it."

All this was so much blarney to the wonderful but unlucky old man. He kept on as long as he could, but the end was not far off, even from the start.

Suddenly he stopped and sank upon his haunches.

"Dem as is fond ob sledge-drawing," he said, "can take dis ting home. I had nuff of it."

His graceless descendants, with the string of their empty sledges over their shoulders, regarded him with well-feigned surprise.

"Does you mean to say," demanded Romeo, "dat you gib in?"

"What's a man to do when him reglar bust up?" asked Macbeth.

"Grandfader bust up!" exclaimed Romeo, looking about him as if announcing the unexpected wreck of a mighty nation.

"It not posserbil," said Hamlet; "it only a trumpery indisposition."

"Whateber it may be," said Macbeth, regarding them with an evil eye, "dat nuffin' to you. You are a pair ob inkrates."

"Well," said Romeo, "for once we reliebe you, being a poor ole man. Fader, you take fust turn wif 'him sledge."

"Dat your duty," said Hamlet, shortly.

"Boys," groaned Macbeth, "one ob de muscles ob my right leg sprained. You bound to gib me a ride home."

There was no shamming in the case. Macbeth had overdone it to keep up his false reputation as a weight-drawer, and one of the sinews or muscles of his leg was injured.

Already his usually spare calf was swelling.

"Romeo," said Hamlet, as he attached his sledge to the laden one, "bring you poor ole grandfader home."

And trotting off, he left the oldest and the youngest of the family to settle the matter between them.

"Dis 'bout de biggest swiddle me eber got into," said the disgusted Romeo.

"You may be a grandfader one day," groaned Macbeth, "den you 'member me."

"Me 'member you now quite nuff," grunted Romeo, as he assisted the old man to a seat on the sledge; "face fust, me s'pose?"

"Dat 'bout de bess way," moaned Macbeth.

Romeo drew the rope over his shoulder, and started with an angry jerk that turned his hapless grandfather head over heels, and rolled him off the sledge.

Apparently unconscious of what he had done, he was proceeding at a great rate, when the yells of the old nigger stopped him.

"Romeo, what you doin' leabin' me behind?"

"What you git orf de sledge for?" asked Romeo, as he went back. "Here, you sit with your back to me, and hold on."

This was really the more sensible position, and Macbeth was shot off no more.

But he had to hold on, for his graceless grandson deliberately selected all the bumpy places to travel over, and never threw away a chance of colliding with a rock or stone.

No old gentleman, black or white, ever before or since received such a shaking and bumping, and lived to tell the tale.

When they came to the castle-path the sledge had

to be abandoned, and Romeo made an effort to carry his grandfather up upon his back.

But after half a dozen falls, in which the old man by some means was always undermost, this mode of progression had to be given up.

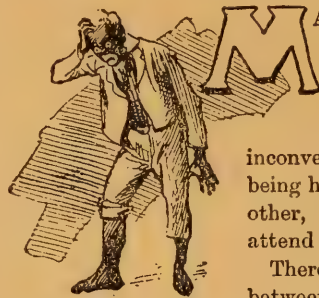
"You tink you can hop home?" asked Romeo.

Macbeth said he would try, and with one hand upon the shoulder of Romeo he really did the rest of the journey in this fashion, arriving at the Long House in such an exhausted condition that he had to be given some wine and put to bed immediately.

"Nebber no more," he groaned, as he lay his head upon the pillow, "will dis chile gib himself out as a musculler man."

CHAPTER CCXV.

THE COMPLETION OF THE "CONDOR."—AN EXCITING TRIAL TRIP.



MACBETH in the morning appeared to be almost himself again. He suffered some slight

inconvenience from one leg being half as big again as the other, but he was able to attend to his duties.

There was some restraint between him and his descendants, but no actual warfare. And it was effectually prevented by Romeo departing with Sleery and a score of others to begin the work of building the cabin on the "Condor."

As that was a task the master carpenter could perform without Giuseppe, the smuggler remained behind with a number of assistants to cut out the sail.

The courtyard of the castle was selected as a workshop, because it permitted of laying out the material, and measuring, and cutting it with freedom.

As we know, there was no lack of material brought from the "Guadalquivir," and at an early hour Giuseppe had the whole thing cut out and his assistants piercing and lacing it together.

"In a week," said Giuseppe, "we shall have our trial trip, and then, senors, you will see what a beauty she is, this 'Condor' of ours."

"Without paint," remarked Terry, who was one of the sail-makers.

"Senor," said Giuseppe, "it is true we have no paint. But did I not understand that the 'Condor' was not wanted for many years? Behold, her timber is dry. It is of a wood that hardens in water; her seams have been well caulked, and where then comes in the paint?"

"I merely mentioned it," remarked Terry.

"As usual," said Dibble, "you merely make yourself disagreeable. Here, stop your mouth with a piece of butter-scotch."

"Not all gone yet?" exclaimed Terry, with affected surprise, as he put the toothsome morsel into his mouth. "Why, they told me you took a pound to bed with you every night."

Dibble treated this calumnious statement as it deserved, with lofty scorn. He would have pleaded guilty to taking two ounces as a soother between the sheets, but the assertion that he took a pound refuted itself in the eyes of all just people.

The necessity of sending home letters to their friends had been in the minds of many of the boys for some days past. In consultation with Giuseppe the feasibility of getting them posted at Minorca, and from thence conveyed to their destination, was discussed.

"Write the letters," said Giuseppe, "and, behold! I take them to Port Mahon in the night and post them there. How many will there be?"

"About sixty," replied Jim.

"Then half shall be posted at Port Mahon," said Giuseppe, "and half at Ciudadela. Then who shall notice them?"

There was sound sense in this reasoning, and the letters were written that night. Early in the morning the smuggler started for Minorca. He proposed to land there in the night, just when the place was getting still, and to seek an interview with Lucia di Valo. From her he could learn if anything for the island schoolboys had arrived.

We need not dwell upon the letters written to show how happy the writers were, and how they "were learning a new trade," to wit, shipbuilding, and had just launched their first bit of work. By confining themselves to such facts the necessity of telling many other things that might have created alarm at home was avoided.

"What a yarn I could spin if I dare!" said Terry, as he closed his letter for home; "but I'll make up for it when we get back to the old country by writing a book."

"And who do you think will publish it?" asked Lal Brodie.

"Lots of publishers," replied Terry, indefinitely; "there will be a rush upon me for it."

"It will sell," said Stiff, emphatically, "at one penny the pound—in the manuscript—and no great bargain at that."

The firing once started, many others had a shot at the coming author of their island adventures, and he let fly in return as well as he was able. But there was no great damage done on either side.

Giuseppe meanwhile had a talk with Sleery and Martin, the former in reference to the fitting of the

boat, and the latter in connection with the making of the sail.

There was the question of the mast, which he recommended to be of a species of larch that grew very straight, and for choice one that had been uprooted by Morse when he blew up the original path to the castle.

"It will be to an extent seasoned," said Giuseppe.

All that was needed in the making of the sail was to see that it was properly put together. The cutting out was finished.

Having thus put matters straight, Giuseppe's mind was at ease, and in the morning he started alone in his boat. All going well, he would be back in three days' time.

He took with him the revolver Jim had promised to the youngster who had played such an important part in their escape from the citadel, and who might be of more service at some future time.

Three days was not long to wait, especially as all were busy early and late. By that time the sail was nearly finished. It was the biggest felucca sail the boys had ever seen. Sleery, too, was getting on with his work, and the cabin was well advanced, when, on the evening of the third day, Giuseppe's boat came gliding into the lagoon, with that worthy alone in her.

He had brought two small bags filled with papers and letters—evidence of the entire success of his trip.

"Lucia di Valo had them in her charge," he said, "for the governor would have none of them."

"And Father Anselmo?" asked Jim, who had run down to meet him.

"He is too cautious to handle explosive material," answered Giuseppe, "so Lucia di Valo, whose charms are troubling the governor now, relieved the men of them, and here they are."

"Did you hear anything of Chorker?"

"Ay, indeed. Divantes, for some purpose of his own, had obtained for him some post in the governor's household. He looks after the servants, or is supposed to do so. He wears a uniform, but, to my grief, I was not able to see him ere I left."

Jim opened the mail-bags. There were no letters for the Farrells, but a quantity of papers that were subscribed for in the usual way. These were sent along by Romeo.

In some of the letters received by the boys there was matter for apprehension. All sorts of rumours concerning the school were floating about, and the friends of Brodie, Terry, Trimmer, and a score others, wanted to know what truth there was in them.

"Our last letters will set their minds at rest," said Jim; "they will at least learn that we are alive and well."

But though his words were reassuring, a feeling of uneasiness remained behind.

Work is the best antidote for mind trouble, and the completion of the "Condor" was hastened on. Nothing marred its progress, except one day's rain, which stopped all outdoor labours. But even that was not wholly lost, for the fittings of the cabin gave work for a few.

At length the boat was completed, and though strongly amateurish in her appearance, she was a creditable piece of work.

"She is like some horses," said Giuseppe, "not beautiful all over, *but with speed under her ribs.*"

The next day was appointed for the trial trip, and in addition to Jim, Martin, Changeling, Trueberry, and Sleery, half a dozen boys were to join. Giuseppe, of course, went as captain.

Lots were drawn for "the happy outsiders," as they were called, and the good fortune came to Johnny Daw, Felton, Dibble, Pesketh, Brodie, and Stiff. The disgust of Terry at his ill-luck was immense.

"You will want me aboard," he said, "before you have been an hour at sea."

"What for?" inquired the jubilant Dibble; "to swab the upper deck?"

"We are not the boys to require a steward," remarked Brodie.

Terry glared at them, and went off whistling. When he got outside he had a look at the stars, as if he thought the contemplation of their brightness might help him.

"I'll go, if I lose my head for it," he muttered.

When the morning came Terry was missing, and Romeo said he had gone out early, "looking sulky." That he should be troubled was natural, but the lucky ones only made fun of him.

"I'll look him up," said Joe Ganthony, "after you are gone, and cheer him up with a bit of shooting."

A pig or two would be acceptable, for the bacon was getting low, and Romeo's little pigs were not yet of the size for killing. Terry was very fond of shooting. So Ganthony remained behind, and the rest went down to see the "Condor" start on her first voyage. The general feeling was one of excitement, and as usual on all such occasions, there was a prophet of evil in their midst.

"I'm afraid," said Dawson, "that with such a big sail she will turn turtle, and go to the bottom."

To which Dibble responded: "Then be thankful you won't be on board."



CHAPTER CCXVI.

A STOWAWAY.—STRANGERS OF NO SMALL IMPORTANCE.



PROVISIONS for the day had been sent down, and one of the small boats from the lagoon enabled the whole party to speedily get on board. The rope that was round the post on shore was cast off, and without loss

of time the sail hoisted and the anchor raised. A favouring breeze blew off-shore, and all promised well.

With a hearty cheer from the spectators on the shore, the "Condor" started on her initial voyage. The favoured few on board lay in the bows or sat astern near Giuseppe, who had charge of the helm. Jim and Martin stood by to assist with the raising and lowering the sail when requisite.

Morse was not of the party, because, as he said, "he had better fish to fry," meaning that he had more important work to attend to in his laboratory. But he gave up some of the early morning to seeing the start, and his cheer was one of the loudest that sent the "Condor" on her way.

Dibble, Pesketh, and Brodie sat near Giuseppe, who at the beginning was silent, his eyes taking in everything in connection with the boat as she glided over the waves.

"Undoubtedly a good goer," remarked Brodie.

The sail at the start had not been fully hoisted, but when well out at sea, Giuseppe motioned for it to be done. Jim and Martin made the rope fast.

Slowly bending over to the breeze, the "Condor" now fairly leaped over the sea, but still Giuseppe spoke not for awhile. He watched her every motion and scanned each rope and the sail and the mast a dozen times ere he opened his lips. At last the oracle spoke.

"Senors," he said, "she is a good boat. She is better than I thought she would be. I would go in her from here to Gibraltar in a storm."

He steered straight out in the direction of the African coast, and then bore up towards Minorca. He tried her before the breeze, with the wind on the beam, and close in the eye of it, and in one and all she answered his every expectation. Nay, more, as was shown by the delight expressed on his face.

Presently Dibble asked if anybody wanted anything in the way of butterscotch, remarking that the last of

his store had been brought on board with the provisions which were in the cabin.

"Fetch it out," said Stiff.

Dibble pulled open the door of the cabin and disappeared. There was a moment's pause, and then a loud yell from within.

Dibble, who had uttered the sound, came tumbling out with his cap off, and a look of terror on his face.

"There's some wild brute on board!" he roared. "It has bitten me in the leg. It is under the table."

Every eye was fixed upon him in profound astonishment, but nobody at first made any reply. Dibble sat down and, turning up his trousers, showed two red marks on his calf.

"The skin isn't broken," said Brodie.

"I thought it was," replied Dibble; it was a precious nip, I can tell you."

Jim came aft and looked at the injured leg, then at Giuseppe, who was gazing at Dibble in profound astonishment, beyond the emotion expressed by others.

Jim, without a word, turned aside and entered the cabin. Almost instantly there was another yell, but it was not Jim's voice. That was heard immediately afterwards.

"Come out and show yourself, you stowaway," he said.

The door of the cabin was kicked open and he emerged, leading by the ear no less a personage than Terry.

"A stowaway, boys," he said, "skulking under the table. What shall we do with him?"

"Throw him overboard!" cried the indignant Dibble.

"You can't do it legally," said Terry. "All the law allows is a prosecution when you reach port."

"But stowaways are made to work," suggested Brodie, "and they keep them short of tommy."

"I didn't come aboard to stuff myself," returned Terry; "keep your beggarly grub to yourself. If you don't want me here, turn back and put me ashore."

"You will be landed on the African coast," said Jim, gravely. "I suppose, Giuseppe, you could make it?"

"If the senor is in no hurry," answered Giuseppe.

"Then head for Africa."

Jim looked very stern, and Terry, who had been grinning since his ear was released, gazed at him in doubt.

"Jim," he said, deprecatingly, "you don't mean it?"

"I am not Napoleon Farrell," was the dry reply, "and mean to be obeyed. You had orders to stop ashore, not being drawn for the trip party, and you disobeyed them. Once for all I mean to make an example of you."

Jim returned to his post, and took no further notice

of Terry, who, with a dolorous expression of face sat down near Dibble.

"Joking is all very well," said the butterscotch provider, "but it may be carried too far. Jim is the wrong sort to be played the fool with."

"But I only did it as a joke," urged Terry.

"And you will be landed in Africa, and that, to us, will be the cream of the joke."

Terry turned his eyes from one to the other and saw nothing but grave faces. That of Giuseppe, on the score of gravity, took the lead.

"Young senor," he said, "this is a trial trip—a serious affair. Jests played on such an occasion are ill-timed."

"Blow it!" muttered Terry. "I never thought it would be taken in this way. Jim——"

"Don't Jim me, please."

"Gordon, then——"

"Don't Gordon me either. Go into the cabin and consider yourself a prisoner. Perhaps *that* is an order you may think proper to obey."

Terry hesitated a moment, and then with a lugubrious face walked into the cabin. Before he could close the door, there was a roar of laughter, and he knew he had been sold.

It was a pleasing discovery in one way, but, in common with most practical jokers, he had a strong objection to being personally taken in.

A sheepish blush passed over his face.

"Come out, you stowaway!" cried Jim.

So the stowaway came forth and tried to look as if he had known it was a jest all along. But the effort was such a palpable failure that it excited another roar of laughter.

"Aren't you sorry," asked Dibble, when the noise had subsided, "that you haven't the grin all on your side?"

"I must confess that I'm a bit done," said Terry, "and I shall be glad if you will drop it."

Jim had brought his glass with him, and was now sweeping the sea with the powerful eyesight assistant.

There were several craft in view, but all far away. Turning to Giuseppe, he pointed in the direction of Minorca.

"I see a boat there," he said, "which seems to be making towards our island."

"Shall we bear down and see what it is, senor?" asked the smuggler.

"I think you had better. Why, there is another going in the same direction. It answers the description of the strange boat seen by Morse and some of you—the boat that brought the calf, you know."

"I should know her," said Terry, anxious to make himself useful, and forget the counter-joke that had rather upset him.

"Come here and take the glass, then," said Jim.

Terry went over to his side and after a short time succeeded in getting a view of both boats.

"One," he said, "is an ordinary felucca, but there is some swell in uniform in her and about a dozen men. The other is either the boat that brought the calf lot or one the very image of her."

"Making for the island, senor?" asked Giuseppe.

"Both of them," was the reply.

Giuseppe looked at Jim, who took the glass from Terry and had another look at the strangers. Undoubtedly their presence was a matter that could not be overlooked.

"They are making for the point beyond the chine," he said, after a pause. "We cannot overhaul them ere they land, but we might run in at Silver Bay and intercept them if their visit is intended for us or—Mr. Farrell."

"The old fellow may have come back for his turban," suggested Terry.

With the exception of Jim's Winchester repeater they had no arms on board, which all now saw was rather a serious oversight. That, however, was better than nothing, and Jim proposed that he should be landed near the bay and the rest make all speed to the castle and bring reinforcements with arms.

Of course Jim's first thought was of Eveline, and he was thinking of acting as her protector, if necessary, until his friends arrived.

"Possibly," he said, "neither of the boats are bent on troubling us. But it will not do to trust to chance in the matter. Giuseppe, run her in. How long will it take you to reach the bay?"

"An hour, senor."

"Which gives us time for dinner. Serve out the grub."

CHAPTER CCXVII.

THE MAN IN THE UNIFORM.—AN ERROR IN WARFARE



LEAVING our friends for a brief spell, we will hasten to see who and what the strangers espied by Jim really were. The two craft, although apparently close when viewed from the distance, were as a matter of fact more than two miles apart. It

was their being in a line with the glass that deceived Jim.

In the nearest to the "Condor" was the strange old man whom we must, for the lack of any other name, call the Missing Link, and by that name he was afterwards known on the island.

As surmised by Terry, he had returned to make another search for his turban, which he believed to have been removed from his head by some natural outburst. He was accompanied by some very different men to those who were with him on the previous occasion. His attendants were now well-armed Moors.

The Missing Link was not concerned with the movements of the other boat, which was, indeed, making for a point much higher up the island, but it concerns us to know that in this craft was no less a personage than the mighty Chorker.

No longer clad in humble semi-seagoing apparel, he sat in the stern of the felucca in the gorgeous array of some Spanish general who lived in the early part of the century.

As to the way he became possessed of it, thereby hangs a tale.

Divantes, true to his word, had, on arriving at Minorca, found him a place in the governor's household.

It was a place of authority over some of the lower servants, and Chorker, as we may readily guess, soon made himself unbearable in it.

The question of his getting a knife between his ribs was a mere matter of time and opportunity.

But Divantes objected to bloodshed in the citadel, as he might be held responsible for it, having brought Chorker there. So he cast about for some plan to get rid of him for good, and all without any fuss.

And this was the notable scheme he hit upon.

He persuaded Chorker that the governor was all-powerful throughout the group of islands, of which Minorca was one, and that a written authority from him would make any man ruler of any special island.

The next step was to persuade Chorker that the governor had marked his commanding way with his inferiors, and come to the conclusion that he was a good man wasted in his office.

One of Chorker's unbounded ignorance and unlimited conceit would naturally swallow this yarn whole.

As a third step, Divantes informed Chorker that he had been appointed as governor of Fermentera, but he was to keep it a profound secret until his certificate of authority was made out. This document was handed to him next day, and as it was written on parchment, with lots of big seals, Chorker, had not the least doubt as to its potency.

Finally Divantes picked out a dozen Ciudadelda loafers—rascals whose room was infinitely more valuable than their company—and engaged them to act as Chorker's bodyguard. Then he despatched the lot to Fermentera, with an unuttered hope that the entire body might get to loggerheads with the boys and be wiped out to a man.

Unconscious of being so thoroughly humbugged,

Chorker crossed the water between the two islands, swelling with increasing authority as he came, and landed on the shore about three miles above the spot from which the Missing Link was heading.

It was Chorker's purpose to proceed cautiously. First of all he would make Mr. Farrell acquainted with the nature of his appointment, and promise him protection if he assisted him in establishing his authority. Afterwards the boys could be informed, and warned of the consequences that might arise from resisting their newly-appointed governor.

He was in a bit of a difficulty with his followers, none of whom understood English, and Chorker did not know a word of Spanish. All his commands had been given by signs.

Possibly Divantes, who remembered Chorker's insolence when in the cave, arranged matters thus as a final touch of a malevolent spirit.

Anyway, when Chorker landed with his men, he motioned for them to proceed slowly along the beach while he ascended to the higher land to see if any of his old enemies, the boys, were abroad.

But the higher ground just there was mainly covered with a kind of gorse, which grew tall enough to shut out the view, save in places here and there where there were gaps of sterility.

Chorker groped his way along, keeping as near as he could guess in a straight line, for a distance that he could but reckon as miles, and then he was startled by a shouting and alarmed yelling from the direction of the beach.

Scared in his turn, he pushed his way to the edge of the cliff, and looking below, saw a spectacle that turned his blood to so much ice-water.

There were his dozen followers lying in different attitudes upon the sands, some with ugly wounds about their heads and faces, others unhurt, but lying down in sheer cowardice, and surrounding them were fully a score well-armed Moors, brandishing their weapons, while the Missing Link, in a gorgeous but unjewelled turban, ran hither and thither to stop the slaughter.

What he said was unintelligible to Corker, but it had the effect of saving the lives of the Minorca loafers. Still the Moors kept close watch upon them while the Missing Link went round interrogating each in turn.

But he spoke to them in a strange tongue, and his questions concerning his lost turban might as well have been addressed to men as deaf as a post.

The brow of the Missing Link grew dark. From questioning he changed to threatening; but the effect was the same, and at last, in a fury that made his beard bristle like the feelers of a cat, he ordered the Moors to "bind the infidels and carry them aboard."

This was a step towards their being sold as slaves.

The Missing Link, finding he could not get at his turban, was determined that he would have some sort of money's worth in exchange.

Men of the loafers' breed fetched a good sum when sold by private contract to certain potentates of sunny Africa.

Whether they knew what their fate was going to be is uncertain, but, at any rate, they howled their loudest, and the row they made caused Chorker to sit down, limp with terror.

Now, among those Moors was a certain Hassan, who all his life, or since he had been old enough to engage in any pursuit, had been connected with the slave trade. He knew the value of the prisoners, and saw through the cunning of the Missing Link.

And to Hassan that personage was no more than a man who had engaged him for a job. Why should he hesitate in getting the better of him? Why not seize the galley and steal the prisoners, and return to his country, leaving the Missing Link to make the best he could of being left behind?

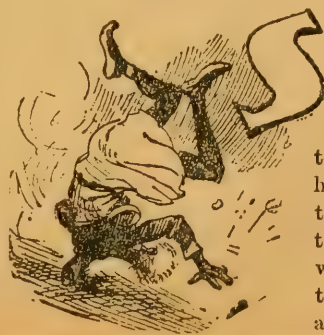
To conceive a piece of villainy was with such a rascal but a preliminary to executing it. The men, he knew, would readily obey him.

"My children," he said, "we have wasted some precious time in coming here, but good fortune has befallen us in these men as a prize. I know of a market for the dogs. Behold, you shall be well paid for helping me to convey them thither; and, beyond that, this galley shall be yours. Let us hoist the anchor and away."

They hastened to obey him with all the solemnity of men who had been thieves and rascals from their birth. They saw no jest in leaving the Missing Link behind, while he, unconscious for the moment of the mistake he had made in seizing the Minorca rascals for slaves, slowly paced the shore wrapped in meditation.

CHAPTER CCXVIII.

JIM MEETS A PRECIOUS PAIR.



SUDDENLY the Missing Link came out of the land of thought, and turned his eyes

towards his galley. To his utter amazement, the sails were up, and the cumbersome craft was slowly paying off the shore. He gazed at it for a moment,

and then, with a truly marvellous agility, when his age is considered, he leapt into the air.

A torrent of commanding cries burst from his lips, but they were as pebbles cast into the waters—nobody heeded them. When the awful truth burst upon him he threw himself upon the sands, and went through a series of contortions; they were like the movements of a freshly-landed conger eel.

Chorker gazed cautiously over the edge of the cliff, and regarded the Missing Link in wonderment. The departure of the boat was not a matter he thoroughly understood. He supposed that his own men and those of the Missing Link had fraternised and bolted with the galley.

Presently, when the paroxysm of rage and grief had somewhat subsided in the breast of the Missing Link, and he stood up, quietly shedding bitter tears, Chorker took note of the fact that he had no arms—at least, none visible.

Having not only a long sword, but a brace of old-fashioned flint pistols, Chorker decided on descending the sloping cliff and conferring with the Missing Link. Possibly he might be some potentate worth knowing.

Accordingly he slipped quietly down, unseen by the other, and putting on a most dignified air, worthy of a clown in a circus, strode towards the weeping one.

The Missing Link heard him approaching, and on seeing a man attired so martially threw himself down upon his knees and nose and grovelled in the sand.

This was eminently to the taste of Chorker, who forthwith proceeded to play the gracious conqueror.

"Git up," he said. "There ain't no cause to be afeard o' me so long as you behaves yourself."

It must have been the tone of his voice, for assuredly he did not understand the words, that led the Missing Link to rise and stand meekly before the mighty Chorker.

He uttered something softly in an unknown tongue, and spread out his hands in token of submission.

"It's a skewrus thing to me," muttered Chorker, "what a lot o' ignorant warmints there are in the world. Even this old cove can't speak English. I say, mister, what's your name?"

The Missing Link clasped his hands and rolled his eyes until they were all whites, but said nothing.

"Where do you come from?" demanded Chorker.

"What's your country, and—and what's your game nere?"

The Missing Link merely smiled, as if pleased.

"Here, come along," said Chorker. "I'll see what that ere Farrell can make of yer. He knows a lot of rotten languages that ain't no good, except to confuse decent folks."

His actions indicating a forward movement, were interpreted, and the Missing Link, having bowed thrice, fell in humbly beside Chorker, who would not trust him in the rear, fearing he might have a knife concealed somewhere and stab him in the back.

"I niver trust furriners," he explained, and the Missing Link looked more pleased than ever.

They strode on along the beach until they were within sight of the chine, and then there stepped out from behind a rock a youth, with a Winchester repeating-rifle in his hand, who called upon them to halt.

It was Jim Gordon.

Of all people on earth Chorker cared less to see Jim at that moment, especially when he felt it imperative to do as he was told.

The Missing Link stared at Jim, and did not seem to think much of his quiet attire; but happening to look at Chorker, and seeing the unmistakable perturbation of his countenance, the wily old rascal promptly prostrated himself upon the sands, and did a bit of perfect grovelling.

"Who is that man with you?" asked Jim.

"Blest if I know," replied Chorker. "I tumbled across him and a lot of blackamoors a short time ago."

"Where are those blackamoors?"

"They've cut it, Mister Gordon."

"And the men who were with you in your boat?"

"Cut it with 'em. All gone and left me to git along as well as I can without 'em."

"You come from Minorca," said Jim.

"I does—on a mission."

"I want to know nothing about your mission. When do you return?"

"I ain't agoing back," said Chorker, doggedly.

"Ask your friend to get up," said Jim.

Chorker asked him with his foot, which he applied to the ribs of Missing Link, who promptly got upon his feet and bowed smilingly, as if he had received a precious gift.

"You are not going back," said Jim, lounging against the rock from behind which he had emerged. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm appointed governor of this 'ere island," answered Chorker.

Jim laughed softly.

"By whom?" he asked.

"Don Carlo Esparto," said Chorker, "and this," dragging out the parchment from an inside pocket of his coat, "is my authority."

"Toss it here," said Jim, "and let me look at it. Don't come too near with that ugly friend of yours, for fear this rifle of mine should go off."

"You won't play no tricks with this yere dockermint?" said Chorker, suspiciously.

"I'll play a trick with you if you don't toss it here," was the reply.

"You was allus honerable," returned Chorker, with forced amiability, "and I trusts you."

He tossed the parchment towards Jim, who caught it neatly and opened it. Running his eyes down the

writing, a broad smile gradually spread over his face, as he said, "I suppose you cannot read this?"

"There ain't no occasion for me to do it," said Chorker; "it's for others to read."

"You know the language it is written in?"

"Can't say as I does, sir."

"It is in French, a language I understand, though I know only a smattering of Spanish. Shall I translate some of it?"

"If you'll be so good, Mister Gordon," answered Chorker, with a sinking heart. Doubts of the genuine friendship of Divantes were springing up in his breast.

"Very well," returned Jim, "I will do so honestly."

The Missing Link stood quiet now, regarding Jim and Chorker in turn with a face wrinkled with cunning. He was still a Missing Link, but nearer the ape end of the chain than ever.

"To all men whom it may concern," read out Jim, "the bearer of this document is a pig of the name of Chorker—a thick-headed mule—an ass of asses—a worm—a reptile for whom the kicks and curses of all men are but acts of justice——"

"Stop a minute," interposed Chorker; "that's a werbatle translation, you say?"

"Practically so—almost word for word," replied Jim.

"All right, sir. Me and Mister Diwantes will have a word on that subject when we meet."

"Shall I go on?"

"I may as well hear the wust, Mister Gordon, while we are on the job."

"This wooden image of a man," resumed Jim, perusing the important document, "has been put out of the citadel of Ciudadelda because he was not fit to keep in order half a dozen horse-cleaners and scullery-wenches. He has no more command in him than there is in a slab of soap, and no more idea of the true bearing of a man in authority than a monkey on a barrel-organ. It is desired that all who read this should forthwith kick him or roll him in the dust."

Signed, "DIVANTES,
Comptroller of the Household of the Governor
of Minorca."

"But them there seals?" said Chorker, dismally seeking for one last faint proof of authority.

"They are simply a lot of wax," replied Jim, looking closely at them, "with the impressions of the most paltry Spanish coins."

He tossed back the document, and looking first at Chorker and then at the Missing Link, said:

"You will understand that you are not to intrude yourselves either on the castle or in the chine. If you do you will be shot or taken care of in one of the vaults of the former-named place."

"But where am I to live?"

"That is for you to decide."

"What am I to do, Mister Gordon?" groaned Chorker.

"You must arrange it as you please," replied Jim,

unmoved. "You have brought this condition of things upon yourself."

"But what am I to do with old monkey-face here?"

"Settle it between you. Only do not come near any of us on peril of your lives."

And Jim having had enough of the conference, turned away and walked into the chine.

Chorker looked at the Missing Link, who was rubbing his nose thoughtfully with his forefinger.

"I've got a pal at last," he said, "blessed if I ain't. Come up, ugly," and he motioned to the Missing Link to follow him on the backward route, and that somewhat mystified old man, seeing there was nothing else to be done, obeyed him.

CHAPTER CCXIX.

A GENERAL WARNING.—JIM REVISITS THE CAVE.



JIM merely wanted to see Mr. Farrell and warn him of the return of Chorker and of his having a companion of whom he knew no more than he had heard from Morse. To his surprise he found that gentleman at home alone. He was sitting indoors reading, and when Jim knocked he appeared to be in some trepidation, for it was fully half a minute ere he opened the door.

"Oh, it's Gordon!" he exclaimed. "I hardly expected you. Come in."

"The ladies are not at home?" said Jim, as he passed in.

"No," was the answer; "they are on the cliff watching that boat of yours. They say it is on its trial trip to-day."

"Yes," said Jim, "I think I said it would sail about this time."

"Day after day," returned Mr. Farrell, "they have gone up expecting to see it. My daughter came running back to me to say that it had started. But I did not join them. I was not interested."

"Chorker has returned," said Jim, abruptly.

"Chorker!"

"Yes, he has been in Minorca, and they have sent him back here. He is with a stranger who comes from another place. I have no direct information concerning him. I merely looked round to warn you against encouraging either here."

"They shall not be admitted on any account."

"Very good, Mr. Farrell. Then I have nothing more to stay for."

"Won't you wait—until—til—the—the ladies return?" inquired Mr. Farrell.

Jim saw by his manner that he was afraid, and on that account alone would have refused him. He had, however, another reason for saying nay. His friends from the castle might be on the way, and he must stop them ere they passed the chine.

"I can't stay," he said; "there is so much to do. Good afternoon, sir."

"Good day, Gordon," replied Mr. Farrell, coldly.

As soon as Jim was outside he heard the door closed and the bolts inside softly drawn. It made the youngster smile.

"As nervous as a kitten," he murmured.

He hastened to the mouth of the chine, and walked slowly along the beach, occasionally casting an inquiring eye upon the summit of the cliff with the hope of getting a glimpse of Eveline. But he saw nothing of her, and hurrying forward, presently espied a strong party, led by Morse, approaching.

They saw him and came running on. He quickly assured them that there was nothing to do, and they all turned back. The "Condor" had gone round, he was told, and was anchored in the lagoon.

When he saw her there he realised her proportions for the first time. She dwarfed all the other boats to mere toys, and he proportionately felt proud of her.

On the way up to the castle he related the story of his meeting with Chorker and of that eminently disagreeable old man, in his company—Morse's friend of the turban.

It created laughter, of course, but Morse said it would be better if both kept off the island.

"By the way," said Jim, "what have you done with that turban?"

"It is in the laboratory, or what is left of it," said Morse. "I have been experimenting with one of the stones, vapourising it, to see what its component parts are."

Jim whistled softly.

"Rather a costly experiment, I expect," he said. "By the way, I picked up some stones when we were in the caves, which you may experiment on with pleasure. Here they are; I forgot all about them."

He produced the two or three pieces he had picked up in the cave, and handed them to Morse, who surveyed them critically.

"I don't know what they are," he said.

"Glad to hear it," replied Jim, laughing; "put them into your pocket and experiment on them by-and-by."

The other boys were trailing behind in the narrow way, and, of course, had not heard the foregoing conversation. One result of it was that it awoke a re-

newed interest in the caves in Jim's breast, and set him thinking upon a second exploration.

Now would be as good as any time for it.

But thoughts of it were driven out of his head by the unexpected appearance of Mrs. Farrell, Eveline, and Miss Elegantine coming down the path.

"Are you not surprised?" said Mrs. Farrell. "We walked all the way through the wood and only lost our way once. Eveline found it again."

"And, as there was nobody at home," added Eveline—"at least, I mean, not many people," she added, with a blush, "we thought we would come and meet you."

"What is the meaning of this warlike outfit?" asked Miss Elegantine.

"A marching out for practice," answered Jim. "I think your coming through the wood was rather risky, as a wild boar might have attacked you, but I am glad to see you. You will come back and have some tea, of course?"

They demurred for a moment, but eventually went back, and were hospitably entertained in the Long House.

Mrs. Farrell was charmed with the arrangements of the place.

"An ideal home—for boys," she said.

"Or girls—if they were all girls," added Eveline. "I like this better than the chine."

When tea was over, the guests rose to go home by way of the beach. Jim got ready to escort them, but Mrs. Farrell objected.

"You have had a very fatiguing day," she said, "and we are not afraid."

Jim would have insisted, but on their getting outside the question of escort was settled by Charley, who came out of his hut and showed by his bearing that he meant to see the ladies home.

"I suppose he will make a good escort," said Jim, glancing at Eveline.

"There are three of us," she said, laughing.

Jim smiled, too. Four was no company to speak of, although two would have been very agreeable. So Charley and the ladies departed, and Jim's thoughts recurred to the cave again.

The question was, whom should he take with him? Morse would want to go for a certainty, but somebody who could act with authority in a moment of need ought to be left behind.

Johnny Daw was the oldest among the boys, but he was only a visitor, as it were, and Jim finally settled on Joe Ganthony. Terry he would take with him if he chose to go. He would complete the party for exploration, for this time the secret of the roaring was, if possible, to be fathomed.

The time of departure was to be immediately after breakfast on the following morning.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



He saw Morse fighting his way across, and could see that the horror of the time had laid hold of him. Suddenly he saw the hook torn away from the rock and the rope drop down into the abyss.

He had no difficulty in getting all to fall in with his views. Morse, as he suspected, was burning to go Martin had been before, and was willing to repeat the visit, and Terry felt honoured in being selected to make one of so important a party.

For the rest there was plenty to do. When nothing else was wanted there was always timber to cut down and fuel to prepare. Giuseppe and Sleery were bent on giving a few extra touches to the "Condor," and Cobbles, Smith, and Changeling were invited to assist.

"About provisions, now, and light?" said Jim, as they discussed these matters in the evening.

"Rations for the day," said Morse, "in case of accidents, and lights for three, lanterns and candles; no oil, as that can be spilled. Whereas if you drop a candle you can pick it up again and there is no harm done."

"Matches," said Terry, who felt it incumbent on himself to make one suggestion.

"I will provide a good substitute," replied Morse. "Look here."

He took from his pocket what seemed to be an ordinary sheet of paper, tore off a small piece, and carefully twisted it. Finally he gave the tip an extra twist, and it was on fire.

"Will burn two minutes," he said, "while we are looking for the dropped candle."

"It is rather a faint light," suggested Terry, critically.

"Blow it out," said Morse.

Terry blew his hardest, but the more he blew the brighter became the light. At every fresh effort the boys laughed loudly.

"Can't it be blown out?" he inquired, breathlessly.

"Yes," replied Morse, and with a faint puff of breath, out it went.

"Oh, that is conjuring," said Terry.

"Nothing of the sort," returned Morse. "You blew down, thus igniting the paper below the flame. I blew up, and away went the light. There is a proper way of doing everything."

"And you know the proper way, if anybody does," said Terry.

"And if anybody doesn't," remarked Dibble, "it is bound to be Terry."

"Butterscotch wit!" sneered Terry.

"No quarrelling there," said Jim, "but let us get everything ready for starting in the morning."

This advice was good, and was promptly acted upon. Such preparations as Morse had to make he went off to the laboratory to attend to.

CHAPTER CCXX.

THE SECRET OF THE ROARING.



ON the morrow at the appointed time the four explorers entered the castle, and made their way to Morse's old working-den. Each carried a bag with his rations slung over his shoulder, and the rest of the necessaries

Martin bore upon his broad shoulders. They had two lanterns, both fitted for burning candles.

All felt a bit serious, although there was no desire to hold back. Jim and Martin already knew something of the place they were about to revisit, and imagination, helped by what they had heard, invested the journey with its proper garment of peril in the minds of Morse and Terry.

The trap was turned back, and one of the lanterns lighted. Morse led the way, and the journey to the opening in the wall of the cave was speedily reached.

"Now as to you, Terry," said Jim, "if you follow my instructions there is nothing to fear."

He described to him the way to get at the iron ladder fixed against the wall, and bade him think of nothing but holding on and taking the descent easy.

"I'm all right," said Terry; "if you don't mind, I will come down last."

"No, you come down third. Martin will be last," said Jim. "It would never do to leave you behind alone. Give me the lantern, Morse."

He took the light, and pushing it before him, entered the opening. Shortly after he was seen to glide downwards, and a faint glare came up from below. Morse dived into the hole, and rapidly followed him. He was the slimmest of the party, and very active.

Now Terry, for the first time, really wished he had not come. There was something very trying to the nerves in creeping through that hole, turning upon his back, laying hold of that ladder, and pulling the rest of himself through.

But he tightened his mouth and started.

He got on all right until it came to the ladder business, and then, as he laid hold of it and began to pull his body through, he shuddered and stopped.

"Come along!" cried Jim, authoritatively; "no finking!"

This way of speaking to him braced his nerves, and with set teeth he pulled himself through, got a foot upon the ladder, and stepped quickly down.

"In all I have gone through," he said, with a gasp, "I have never felt anything like that."

"It set me creeping all over," admitted Morse.

"Oh, if you felt that," said Terry, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, "I don't mind."

Martin speedily joined them, and without any hitch on the way they reached the door of the cave, and stopped to listen.

They had heard no roaring by the way, and could hear none now!

Jim stared at Martin, who returned his look with interest.

"We never could have dreamt it, Martin?"

"We could never have dreamt it, nor anything like it."

They opened the door and stepped into the cave.

The stillness was profound.

"There is the table and the seats," said Jim, triumphantly. "We did not dream everything."

"We dreamt nothing," insisted Martin.

"Let us go on," advised Morse. "We can look at these things, if we want to, when we come back."

"I must confess," remarked Jim, as they walked along the even, sandy bottom of the cave, "that I was never more licked! Why, from here we could see a faint glittering in the distance. We can see nothing like it now."

No; all was black ahead, as black as e'er was place on the earth or under it.

"Not so fast, Jim," said Morse, after a time; "be sure of your ground before you tread upon it. Suppose we stop a moment?"

They halted, and Terry was about to make a remark, when Morse asked him to be silent.

"I hear a something," he said.

They could all hear it—a curious, bubbling, rippling sound, but not at all like that awful roaring Jim and Martin had heard.

"What is it?" asked Terry. "Sounds to me like some big animal licking its foot."

"We must go further to make out what it is," replied Morse. "Move on, Jim—or stop a moment! Let us have another light."

He lit the second lantern, and walked on by Jim's side. They proceeded cautiously, and soon halted again.

The same sound was heard, but a little louder. Morse listened closely, and the light of knowledge leapt into his face.

"I think I know what it is," he said. "Jim, your roaring friend is resting."

"What is it?" asked Jim.

"Wait until I am sure," was the reply.

He moved on, very slowly now, and with his eyes fixed ahead. So they travelled good two hundred yards or more, and then a cry burst from his lips:

"Halt, Jim!"

It had come upon them suddenly, a wide gap in the earth, right across the cave. It might have been forty feet across, but it was not seen by them until then, owing to rising, rocky ground on the other side.

And what peculiar ground it was! Holding up their lanterns, they could see that the rocks or stones were all of brilliant colours—red, blue, green, yellow—and all looking transparent in the light.

"There is the cause of the glittering we saw," said Martin.

"No," replied Morse, "it was the water rushing down those gem-like rocks you see, and the roaring came from the depths into which it fell.

"Water?" said Martin, wonderingly.

"Yes, see—there, in the corner, is a tiny dribble that falls into this chasm, and that is what makes your animal licking its foot, Terry."

"Yes, I hear it," said Terry.

"Listen!"

Water, in tiny dribbles, was trickling down here and there, until it came to the edge of the chasm, and then it fell into the depths below. The quantity was very small, and only perceivable when closely looked for.

"Now to get some idea of the depth of this chasm," said Morse.

He lay down upon his stomach and thrust his head over the dark rent. Although there was no actual peril, all his friends shuddered, and Terry uttered a soft cry.

"Shall I hold you, Morse?" inquired Jim.

"What for?" was the quiet reply.

He drew out one of his paper-matches from his pocket and set it alight. Then he let it go, and it went fluttering down and down until it became a mere speck. Finally it went out of sight, or perhaps out altogether.

"I can't tell the depth," he said, drawing back.

"It is something immense."

"What's come of all the water?" asked Martin.

Morse did not immediately reply, and as he was the only one there who could offer a reasonable theory, Jim and Terry were silent.

"Underground rivers," said Morse at length, looking dreamily across the chasm, "are common enough, although we cannot tell how they are formed, or for the most part exactly whither they go. I was reading an excellent work on the subject some years ago—"

"Goodness!" exclaimed Terry.

"I began reading very young," said Morse, with a smile. "Well, in this book I read that some of these rivers get mixed up with the lava of volcanic fires, and that is how eruptions are caused."

"But eruptions don't go on for ever," said Jim.

"Nor do rivers like this flow on for ever. They appear to me to be like those mountain-supplied torrents that dry up in the summer. Take this one, for instance."

"Yes?" said Jim, inquiringly.

"In the winter—you were here at the tail end of it—the water was pouring down on the other side a perfect cataract. The spring is here, and the water has practically disappeared."

"I haven't a head for these things," said Martin, scratching his cranium. "Where can the water come from?"

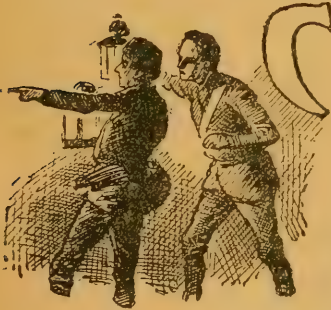
"Anywhere, almost. It may even have its origin in the draining of Spanish rocks."

"And come right under the sea?"

"Not necessarily. We are not far from the mainland, under which it may wind about, and between the island and the coast the sea is rather shallow. But I won't theorise any longer. What I want to do is to get at those rocks on the other side, and, somehow, I mean to do it."

CHAPTER CCXXI.

A PLAN FOR CROSSING THE CHASM.—MORSE IS NOT TO BE DETERRED.



"ROSS the chasm!" exclaimed Jim, with his eyes opened to their fullest extent.

"Did you ever see any rocks or stones like those over there?" asked Morse, evading a direct reply.

"Can't say I have. But, old fellow, how can you get over? You can't jump forty feet."

"Not just yet."

"And you can't use a leaping-pole, or fix up a trapeze?"

"No, I am afraid not. But for all that it can be done. Now, in the corner there you see that piece of rock sticking up like a milestone?"

They could see it well enough, but hardly saw the use of it.

"The water," pursued Morse, "in rushing down only reached half-way. What is the result? The other side of it is worn away, so that the top is almost mushroom-shaped."

"All that is clear," said Jim, "but——"

"Wait a moment," interposed Morse. "Now, suppose a strong hook could be got on there, it

would hold if it were attached to a rope, and somebody this side pulling it taut. Or a post might be fixed in here——"

"That will do, Morse," said Jim, with a shiver. "We are not going to allow you to risk your life in such a venture."

"Now that the idea is in my head I shall have to act upon it," answered Morse. "Such is the perversity of those who give their lives to science. Besides, there is no real peril if we take precautions."

"I don't see how we can do that," remarked Martin, who had the look upon his face that showed he felt "creepy."

"But you will see it," returned Morse, "when I show it to you. Say that I have a second rope, a strong one, round my waist, and you paying it out as required as I work my way hand over hand? The end can be attached to the post we are going to fix up, of course, and as the rope will be short, I cannot fall far. Well, there we are, with every precaution taken and no serious accident possible."

"I think we will be getting back," said Jim, rather abruptly.

"Somebody has been across this ere now," urged Morse.

"Impossible!"

"The piece of glittering stone or jewel you gave me was chipped off yonder rocks. There is nothing like it this side."

"I want to get back," said Jim.

"We have brought a lot of grub," replied Morse, "and, if you don't mind, I should like to dine here, and I promise I won't interfere with your appetites by talking anything more about the matter."

"Suppose we go back and dine at that big table by the entrance door" said Terry.

"As you please," said Morse.

Jim and Martin were only too willing to get away from a spot for which they had suddenly conceived the deepest loathing, and they all returned to the table.

It was suggested that Jim should take the head of it, but he declined, and Morse laughingly took it.

"Some deep old sages have sat here in the long, long ago," he said.

"Hang the lot of them!" growled Jim.

"Too late to carry out your suggestion," returned Morse. "Terry, as we have not been so long down here as we anticipated, we can be prodigal with our candles. Light up half a dozen. We will have an illumination."

They had no candlestick, of course, but the simple process of dropping a little fat upon the table made a sticking-place for the candles, and when they were lit up Morse declared the effect to be "quite gay."

"Reminds me of a tea-garden at home," grinned Terry.

"Does it?" muttered Jim; "more like a tunnel."

Martin said nothing. He was glad the underground work was about to end for the day, and he hoped Morse would think better of his proposed venture. To the blacksmith it was a conception of madness.

"If I tried it," he thought, "as soon as I felt myself hanging over that awful hole I should go as limp as a stale white herring."

They had fair appetites in spite of their thoughts, and there was some effort to talk lightly on matters that had to do with their lives in the open air. Chorker, as a lively subject, was introduced, and Morse named his turbaned friend by giving him the cognomen of The Link.

"Why Link?" asked Martin.

"Did you never hear of the theory on man being descended from monkeys?" said Morse.

"Yes; but I am not going to believe it."

"No more do I. But the men who support the theory say that there is a missing link in the line of evolution. A monkey at his best, in a brain point of view, is a poor creature compared to man at the worst. Now, I think that if by any chance the theory is right, we have got hold of the link here."

Of course they laughed at the notion, but henceforth the stranger was to be known as the Link among the boys, and, like many other things we don't like, such as the influenza, he had come to stay, because he could not get away.

Having finished their dinner, Martin lit his pipe, and they sat talking a while; but Morse was the only one of the party who was really in a cheerful mood. At intervals he would glance around as a naturalist would do on finding himself in a land rich with plants, of which the world as yet knew nothing.

A thorough boy in some respects, he was in others head and shoulders over them all. He could act as a boy because he was one, but there is little doubt he usually thought as a man.

"I suppose," he said, as they rose to return, "that there is nothing more in this line to be discovered?"

"I think not—to-day," replied Jim. "Surely you ought to be satisfied."

"I am, Jim. Nay, more, I am charmed, delighted," and he looked it.

They were walking towards the door, when a sound from the direction of the chasm caused them all to halt. It was not very loud, it did not by any means approach the original roaring, but it was unmistakably the noise of falling water.

"The cataract has started again," said Jim.

"So it appears," replied Morse, calmly. "I reckon it has been raining near the source of it."

"You won't be able to try your experiment now," said Jim, in a lighter tone.

"It won't rain all the spring," answered Morse, "and in the summer scarcely at all."

Morse was not to be deterred, and Jim, who knew what he was when his mind was made up, groaned within himself.

"Let us go back," he said.

CHAPTER CCXXII.

TWO MENDICANTS ARRIVE AT THE LONG HOUSE.



JOE GANTHONY was left in charge, and naturally did not go forth to labour as the majority of the other boys did. His place was at home, with Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo, and for company he chose Dawson and Dibble.

under the pretence of the need of sentinels. They were desired to get themselves up in that character, so far as arming with their rifles, and Joe had borrowed Morse's Winchester repeater.

The trio, thus prepared to keep off a foe, of whom they had no fear, took things easy. They brought out the most comfortable seats they could find, a book to read, and sat themselves down, as Johnny Daw had done on a previous memorable occasion, before the open gate of the stockade.

Reading and chatting for a change, two hours passed away very agreeably. They were at peace with all the world, and felt as if they could put up with a lot of that sort of life.

From the distance arose the softened sound of the axe as the woodfellers laboured below, and occasionally the cry of some ocean bird that had ventured inland broke the stillness.

There were also now and then sounds of verbal war from the interior of the Long House, and some choice negro compliments exchanged by the combatants, but that was all for the time.

At last the stillness was broken by a soft, shuffling step in the direction of the path, and Charley, who had been dozing in his hut, put his head out interrogatively.

Joe Ganthony and his sentinels were instantly on the alert. Experience had taught them that it was the unexpected that always happened on the island.

"Down, Charley," said Joe, as he advanced to the gate. The footsteps ceased, and, on looking out, Joe

beheld, to his astonishment and disgust, Chorker and the Missing Link standing side by side in an attitude of the deepest humility.

"What do you want here?" demanded Joe, sternly.

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed Dawson, as he and Dibble drew up behind Ganthony. "What cheek!"

For all that they could hardly help laughing at Chorker's get-up, not at all improved by his having slept somewhere in the open air.

The Missing Link eyed the three rifles apprehensively, and went through a series of humble jerks like a mechanical doll, made by an amateur, at work.

"I admits, Mister Ganthony," replied Chorker, "that I ain't got no right here. I'm drawed here by a speeches of magnet—the goodness of your 'arts."

"Indeed; and being drawn here, what then?"

"You wouldn't see even a warmint like me starve for a bit o' wittles, and you a-rolling in prodigal plenty."

"Excuse me," said Joe, "when did you ever see us rolling among our food?"

"I spoke in a hallergorycal sense," replied Chorker, apologetically.

"Speak with your own sense," said Dawson, "if you have any."

"I ain't had anything to eat since yester artemnoon," pleaded Chorker, "and there niver was sich air as we git here for working up a happytite. I feel as if I could eat a bit of wolf."

"Why not try a cut off him?" suggested Joe, pointing to the Missing Link, who bowed and skipped in grateful acknowledgment of being noticed.

"No or'nary cannibal," replied Chorker, in deep disgust, "could tackle him."

"Why is he with you?"

"Because he sticks to me. I don't want him. It's no use hollerin' at him. You might do it till you blowed your head orf, and all he does is to bob about and grin, as if you had made him a present."

Of course, his hearers knew all, or all that was known, about this odd stranger, and the idea of Chorker being saddled with him, perhaps for life, naturally amused them.

Chorker suddenly burst in with a renewal of his appeal.

"Gimme something to eat, if it is only a mouldy biscuit."

Joe whispered a few words to Dawson, who sped away into the house. There he collected a lot of odds and ends of the food, all wholesome and clean, which Joe took from him and handed to Chorker.

"You had better divide it," he said, "and be fair."

The eyes of the Missing Link on seeing food assumed a wolfish glare, which led Ganthony to remark in an undertone to his companions: "If Chorker wouldn't eat him, I'll back him at a pinch to eat Chorker."

Sitting down, the last-named individual proceeded

to divide the food given him, doing his level best to reserve for his own use what may be called the tid-bits. But Joe Ganthony insisted on a fair division, and the Missing Link received justice.

They made a hearty meal, eating as very hungry men will do until they could eat no more, and there was still enough left for another meal.

Chorker tied his up in a yellow silk pocket-handkerchief, part of his official outfit; but the Missing Link put his away in a pocket that hung under his robe, as the pockets of our grandmothers used to be fixed under their dresses.

It had a suspiciously capacious appearance, and the spare food scarcely filled up a corner of it.

"I suppose I couldn't see Mister Gordon?" asked Chorker, as he got upon his feet.

"Not to-day—he's busy," replied Joe, shortly.

"I want to see him pertickler. Tell him I feels what a sinner and a low-down creetur I've been, and I 'opes as he will allow me to come back and work so as to keep me from starvation."

"With your friend there, I suppose?"

"No, Mister Ganthony, not if I can injuce him to go away. Tell Mister Gordon as I was brought up low and hadn't no proper ideas put into my head and 'art. But I'll hact straight in the future."

Here the Missing Link, feeling that it was incumbent on him to say something, stood forward and delivered a short but entirely incomprehensible address, finishing off with a series of bobs and bows, which did not terminate until he, in backing, fell over a stone and knocked his head heavily on the ground.

He jumped up, however, and seeing that Chorker was already retreating down the path, bounded after him with a series of curious steps that set the boys off into fits of laughter.

Among his other charming peculiarities, the Missing Link, when moving in a hurry, had a habit of turning every sixth or seventh step into a skip. He was likewise incommoded by his robe, as was seen when he nearly fell in three instances, and in the fourth did so, heavily.

But he must have been made of fibrous material, for as soon as he was down he was up again, and in pursuit of Chorker.

No dog ever more faithfully followed his master, and all remonstrances, let alone stronger expressions, were thrown away upon him. He accepted them all as kindly expressions, and gave back a smile for every oath and personal insult.

"It would be good fun to have the pair somewhere handy," said Joe Ganthony, as they turned back to the Long House.

"I couldn't stand the old man," replied Dawson. "Chorker was bad enough, but old Hop-and-Kick would be too much for me."

"Or for any of us," said Dibble.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when Jim and his friend unexpectedly returned. At the earliest they were not looked for until the evening. On hearing of Chorker's coming, he was at first inclined to be wrathful, but Morse touched him on the arm and whispered a word in his ear.

"If you think so," said Jim, doubtfully.

"Let them have a hut to themselves somewhere in the wood, handy but not too close," said Morse. "I am very curious about the Link. He was no ordinary African to have been possessed of that turban. Besides, if you allow them to wander at large, there is no knowing what mischief they may get up to. Have them near and keep them employed."

"I generally take your advice," replied Jim, "and I won't oppose it now. But the pair will have to keep outside the stockade."

"Certainly," said Morse, "and outside the castle, too."

Jim went off to see how the wood-cutters were getting on, and Morse took Martin by the arm and led him aside.

"You will make me a strong hook, won't you?" he said; "something that is tough and will bear a good strain."

"Give up the notion—do!" pleaded Martin.

"I can't," answered Morse. "I shall never rest until I have crossed that chasm and got possession of some pieces of those wonderful rocks—if rocks they are."

"Suppose I won't make you a hook?"

"Then I will make one for myself."

"And it would break with your weight, lad," said Martin. "As you are so bent on it, I'll make the hook, and it shall be strong enough to bear an elephant."

CHAPTER CCXXIII.

CHORKER IS TO HAVE A LAST TRIAL.—THE FARM AND THE VINEYARD.



MARTIN, though he had promised to make the hook, resolved to be as long as he possibly could about it, under the plea of time being requisite to give it the necessary toughness. But his main idea in creating delay

was founded on the hope that, on reflection, the

ardour of Morse would cool and the project be abandoned.

But he had yet to learn that the young chemist held fixed notions when once they were seriously entertained, and it would take more than persuasion of friend or foe to induce him to abandon any of his conceptions. The curiosity of Morse was fully aroused, and it was certain that he would cross that chasm or go to the bottom of it in the attempt.

Jim, knowing Chorker, looked for him at an early hour in the morning, and sure enough he came hobbling up the path before breakfast. Behind him was his inseparable, the incomprehensible Missing Link.

"Good-morning, Mister Gordon," said Chorker; "I begs your pardon for bringing this party along, but he ain't to be shook off."

"I am not certain that he hasn't a greater claim upon our hospitality than you have," said Jim. "Anyway, quite as much."

"I ain't sich a stranger to you, Mister Gordon."

"That is true. We know you rather too well."

Chorker sniffed, and the Missing Link, watchful of the speakers as usual, bowed three times to Jim.

"He aggrawates me with that," growled Chorker. "He starts off as if he had clockwork inside him, and the more you cusses him the more he bobs about."

"I understand that you wish to be again received here, in spite of what I told you," said Jim.

"Yes, sir, if so be as you feel you can once more forgive me. I'll go straight in the futur'."

"You had better, or I will stop your going for good and all. But you are not to enter the Long House."

"Werry well, sir."

"Nor the castle."

"Where am I to go, sir?"

"You can have a hut somewhere between here and the beach. You must build it with the assistance of your friend, for none other will be given you, and when it is done you are not to stray from it further than the lagoon without special leave."

"Yes, Mr. Gordon, I hears. I ain't fond of strayin'. I've had too much of it as things are."

"You will also be held responsible for the movements of—your friend."

"Friend, indeed; cuss him!" muttered Chorker, under his breath.

"You will make him understand what he is to do, and keep him out of mischief."

"But the warmint—axing your parding for sich langwidge—ain't been brought up to speak English."

"You must teach him," said Jim. "Now wait here, and I will send you out something to eat. After breakfast Sleery will lend you some tools. Then go to work."

Chorker was very glad to be near his old acquaintances on any terms, but the weight of bitterness,

inspired by the society of the Missing Link, effectually robbed him of nine-tenths of the pleasure he would have otherwise felt.

He glared at him evilly while Jim was gone to order him something to eat, and received nothing but smiling grins in return.

"I wish he would use bad langwidge for a change," groaned Chorker.

Romeo brought out some coffee and bacon, and a big biscuit apiece. As soon as the Missing Link espied Romeo, he uttered a cry of delight. Sniffing the aroma of the coffee, he rolled his eyes in ecstasy.

"You got a chum now, Old Chorker," grinned Romeo.

"How would you like him?" demanded Chorker, sullenly.

"You be cibil," said Romeo, "or me stop you rations. De ole man—de young genelman call him de Link—much too good comparry for you. Whar dat article ob war making you de gubnor ob de island? Oh, when me hear dat, me bust out laughin', an didn't stop all night."

"Then you didn't sleep?" said Chorker, as he took his breakfast.

"Why not?" asked Romeo; "did you nebber larf in you sleep?"

"No."

"How do you know that, Mister Clever? Yah! dere not much larf in you any time. Now, Link, don't you be in sich a hurry, less you scald you troat wif dat corfee."

Coffee must have been a familiar and favourite drink, as he went for it and drank a portion at the imminent risk of burning his throat.

It brought the tears into his eyes, it is certain, but he did not mind that. Squatting down, he placed the mug handy on the ground, and fell upon the food with an appetite that very nearly equalled that of the day before. Romeo felt a kind of fascination stealing over him as he watched the movements of the Missing Link. It was the class of feeling which comes over one when they meet with something their mind associates with the supernatural.

He could not pull himself together and go away, but stood watching him, spellbound, until the voice of his father recalled him to himself.

"You goin' to stop out dere all day?" cried Hamlet from the gateway.

Romeo started, and with an effort turned round and walked back to the stockade.

"Fader," he whispered.

"What now?" asked Hamlet, tartly.

"See dat ole man dere?"

"Whar?"

Hamlet had not so much as glanced at the pair outside. Romeo pointed them out.

"Golly! who dat?" exclaimed he.

"Fader," whispered Romeo, "a convicter come ober me dat he not mortifful."

"He put away de grub in a mortifful manner," suggested Hamlet.

"Dat may be," returned Romeo, "but he do it to conceal him real character. You nebber see dem ghostesses in de old schoolhouse?"

"Nebber."

"Dat ole man de image ob one ob dem."

"Crickum!" exclaimed Hamlet, aghast, "you nebber mean dat for sure?"

Romeo had made this assertion without premeditation. It rolled from his lips, as many other utterances had done, without a thought.

But, having given it vent, he was not going back on it.

"Dat's so," he said; "but don't you and grand-fader gib way to any larins about him. *Me got him in hand.* He come up here all bounce dis mornin', but de moment me fix dis lef' eye ob mine on him he gib a squirm, and pretend he not a ghose at all."

This was to an extent reassuring, for did not Romeo, on a previous occasion, show that he was able to hold the spirits in check? Nevertheless, Hamlet shook in his spare attire, and walked back to his duties, feeling as white as it was possible for a nigger to do.

When Hamlet peeped out an hour later he saw that the fearsome Missing Link was gone, and on informing Romeo of the fact, was calmly assured by that veracious young man, "Dis chile send him away, and he not to come inside de stockade on pedal ob him bein' blown to bits."

"How you blow a spirit to bits?" asked Romeo.

"Dere am a way ob doin' it," said Romeo, mysteriously, "and if ebber he come rowling in here wifout *my* leab, me jess show you how it done."

Of course Macbeth had been informed of the new terror, and his aged body was set quivering with fear. But he trusted in Romeo, even as Hamlet did, and two days passing without their seeing anything of the Missing Link. The reputation of Romeo as a spirit-layer became still more firmly established.

None of the three went far from the Long House, and the talk of the boys being on other matters, they knew nothing of the fact that Chorker, assisted in a special way by the Missing Link, was building a house in the wood below. That discovery was to be made hereafter.

It was a busy time with the boys, planting on the farm, digging, hoeing, and so on. In the vineyard there was also much to do, for the vines had grown in a tangled condition, and the labour of cutting them out and thinning them in other ways, was really immense.

Giuseppe in this work showed another of his accomplishments. He understood the cultivation of the vine, and showed Dawson and his assistants many things they ought to do to ensure a good crop, that were new to them.

But while the arts of peace were thus cultivated, the possibility of another war was not forgotten. Morse varied his studies in the laboratory with the making of gunpowder, and utilising it for cartridges.

Thus three days passed, and Martin hoped that he had forgotten his project of crossing the chasm, but from this hopeful dream he was awakened by Morse, who, on the fourth day, suddenly asked him if he took so long to make a hook, and if so, why?

"Really," replied Martin, candidly, "I hoped you had forgotten it."

"Let me have it to-night, or in the morning," said Morse, quietly.

CHAPTER CCXXIV.

CHORKER AND THE MISSING LINK AS BUILDERS.—A VANISHING JOINT OF PORK.



LEFT to themselves, save that Romeo brought them their daily rations, Chorker and the Missing Link were busy for four days endeavouring to build a shelter for themselves. Prudent was the selection of the spot. It was out of sight of anyone going up or down the path, and in a slight hollow, sheltered by the trees from the sun and wind.

The labours of the pair were not blessed with very good results, thanks to Chorker's boundless ignorance of the rudiments of the builder's art, and the unconquerable stupidity of the Missing Link.

The latter was willing to make himself useful, but apparently he had no idea of Chorker's object when the tree-felling began.

Possibly, the Link had lived all his life in a desert country where there were no houses and only a few trees in the oases, too valuable to be felled. Certain it is that he was always in the way, and had several narrow escapes from having his brains knocked out by falling branches and trunks of beech and fir.

Chorker would gladly have killed him by this means if he dared, but he feared he might be held responsible. So instead of rejoicing at the continuous peril of his companion, it kept him in a state of continuous terror.

"Come out of the way!" he was continually roaring, as he lopped off branches under which the Missing Link invariably placed himself, and looked up in admiring recognition of Chorker's labours, "do you want your head smashed?"

It was only on his being urged by the most violent gesticulations that he consented to move, and once he was too late.

A branch about as thick as a man's arm fell upon his head, knocked off his turban, and laid him on his back. But he arose beaming, as if it had done him a world of good, and replaced his turban with the greatest care. Immediately afterwards he was in peril again.

At length Chorker got on with his house and put up the four walls. Just as he was about to finish them, he discovered that he had forgotten both the window and the door. In his exasperation he went near killing the Missing Link, who seemed to find in the omission an occasion for special rejoicing, for he not only smiled as usual, but began to waltz in his peculiar fashion and sing.

Chorker cut openings for the windows and door, and proceeded to put on rafters for the roof. While fastening one of them as he sat astride the apex of the roof, the whole thing gave way, and as the Missing Link was inside, he was fairly buried under the ruins of the building.

Chorker lay among the timber, and relieved his feelings by the utterance of some appropriate remarks, mainly bearing on the Missing Link, and then proceeded to rebuild their home. Experience helped him to put it up more securely, and at last he got together something that would serve for shelter, better than the rough bower of branches and timber under which he and his satellite, the Link, had been sleeping.

Thus an entire week passed away, and he saw nothing of those living near him, excepting Romeo. One morning that veracious nigger brought down a hand of pork for Chorker and the Link.

"Marse Dawson been out shooting," he said, "and kill six pigs. Sich a run ob luck at not missing any ob dem as neber was. Habin' plenty ob fresh meat, Marse Gordon send you dis."

"Give him my duty and heartfelt gratitude," replied Chorker; "say that I allus knowed he was kind. A bit o' roast pork *will* be a nice change for dinner."

He had fitted up a sort of hearth in his hut, and with a hook and a piece of cork he made a crude roasting-jack. Firing he had in plenty.

With what joy one of his greedy habits hung over that joint of pork to roast we leave the reader to guess. It was a labour of love, if ever there was such a thing in this world.

With a dish made of wood beneath it to catch the dripping, and a spoon of the same material, he basted

the joint until the time came when the brown crackling showed it was nearly done.

Then it happened Chorker had burnt all his fuel, and he temporarily left the hut to fetch some more.

Strange to say, the Missing Link showed not the slightest interest in the proceedings. This was the more unaccountable as he was as a rule wonderfully greedy to get his share of the good things that fell to their lot.

All the time Chorker, with loving care, was basting and watching the joint, the Missing Link sat outside upon a stone thinking in his hazy fashion or dozing.

Chorker saw him sitting on that stone when he went round to the back of the hut where their pile of fuel, the remnants left out of the building operations, was kept. Filling his arms with short pieces of timber, he hastened back.

The Missing Link sat on the stone as before, and with his eyes tightly closed. He also softly snored.

"The lazy beast!" muttered Chorker, "I've a good mind to eat the ole j'int right orf without waking him. I feel as if I could do it."

Growling in his disgust he entered the hut, glanced at the fire, and staggered back against the wall.

The joint was gone!

There was a portion of the string dangling, and the wooden dish with the fat and gravy, but the joint—the luscious joint of pork—was no longer there!

A blow from a savage's club would not have more staggered the dismayed Chorker. He looked around the hut with a vague idea that the joint might somehow have fallen from the string and rolled away. But there was nothing beyond the bare, beaten earth that served as a flooring to be seen under the crude table he had made.

From the inside to the outside of the hut Chorker went and looked about him like a man in a dream.

Suddenly he thought of Charley. It is true that the bear, as far as he knew, had hitherto as a matter of choice confined his eating to vegetable food.

But then, like its betters, it might have felt the need of a change of diet.

Yet there were no signs of the animal having paid a visit to the hut. The loose soil around would surely have received and retained the impression of his huge paws.

No, it was not the work of Charley, and if not Charley, only the Missing Link remained to be suspected.

Chorker walked softly up and gazed at the sleeping beauty, who nodded his head and drew long breaths and snored as became a sleeper in an uncomfortable position.

"He can't have bolted it," mused Chorker. "He is a bit of a cormorank, but he ain't up to that."

He walked round the Link, and when he got to leeward of him Chorker suddenly sniffed.

Undoubtedly there was the aroma of roast pork in the air. A dig in the back awoke the sleeper.

"Git up!" roared Chorker, "and let me see if you are sitting on it."

The Missing Link, aroused, got upon his feet, and stared at Chorker in mild surprise. There was no joint to be seen, but the aroma was more pronounced.

Light broke in upon Chorker. With a yell of fury he grasped the long robe of the Missing Link and raised it, disclosing the capacious pocket with the knuckle-end of the joint of pork sticking out of it.

"Give it up, or I'll have yer life!"

The Link, ignoring this dread threat, wrenched himself free, and, with an agility that rivalled the chamois pursued by the hunter, bounded away.

Chorker was no runner, and he pursued in vain. The Missing Link was soon out of sight, and his pursuer returned to the hut in a state bordering on madness.

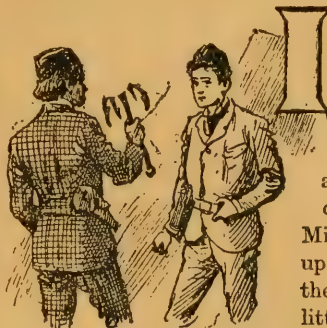
"He must come back," muttered Chorker, "and when he does, I'll murder him!"

But the Link did not return that night, and when Chorker awoke on the following morning he was still away.

But he must have visited the hut, for the bone of the joint, picked as clean as an ivory knitting-needle, lay on the table, a maddening sight to the unfortunate old man, thus nefariously deprived of his anticipated feast.

CHAPTER CCXXV.

MORSE CARRIES OUT HIS IDEA.—THE TERRORS OF IT.



It was rarely Jim Gordon was seen with a gloomy face, but one morning—it was on the day that Chorker, awakening, beheld the completed work of the Missing Link—he was up very early, and when the boys came out for a little fresh air they discovered him pacing to and fro in a melancholy mood.

Joe Ganthony and Johnny Daw joined him, and asked almost in the same breath, as it were, if anything had happened in the night.

"No," Jim answered; "it is Morse I am worrying about. He intends to carry out that mad project of his to-day."

"Crossing that chasm you told us about?" exclaimed Ganthony.

"Yes; and you who have never seen it can have no idea, or a very imperfect one, of its terrible appearance. It isn't because it is very wide, because it is not, nor because of its depth exactly. It is the fact that whatsoever goes down there passes away to the very secret recesses of the earth that makes the place so awe-inspiring."

"I suppose he is not to be persuaded out of it?" said Daw.

"If anyone here could persuade him," replied Jim, "I think I am that person. But I have tried my best with him and failed."

The object of these dolorous remarks now appeared looking remarkably bright and spry. In his hand he held a triple hook, a sort of grappling-iron such as they use when ballooning for holding on to the earth at the finish of the aerial journey.

"Good morning," he said, cheerfully. "Look here, Jim; isn't this a beauty? I call it Martin's masterpiece!"

"I wish you would allow me to carry it away and sink it in the lagoon," answered Jim.

"What!" exclaimed Morse, laughing, "and so give Martin the trouble of making another?"

"You know what I mean," retorted Jim.

"My dear old boy," said Morse, laying a hand affectionately upon his shoulder, "I have not a third of the pluck you possess, and yet I am going to do this thing without a quiver of one of my nerves. Feel my pulse."

"It isn't what you feel now," replied Jim, "but the possibility of losing your nerve when——"

"Yes, I know; when I am crossing the rope. But, my dear fellow, I am going to rely upon you and some others, who are not likely to fail me at a pinch, to save me if anything goes wrong. If you shake my trust in *your* nerve I am done for."

"I may lose it at the most important time."

"I shall believe it when I experience it," said Morse. "Come, no more of it. I am going, if I go alone, but I should prefer some of the boys to be with me. Then there is Changeling, he wants to come, and Dawson; and I suppose you would prefer being with us, Daw, to being left at home?"

"I should, if I can be of service," answered Johnny.

"Come one, come all, this rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I!"

cried Morse, merrily; "meaning, of course, dear boys, that nothing will stop me. So come along and peck. Afterwards, all who wish to see me make a fool of myself had better enrol their names."

Terry had told the boys of the perils attending the getting to the lower cave, dwelling with grim force on that part of the journey in which the iron ladder played a part. It rather daunted some of the youngsters, but when Morse's invitation became

known the desire to accompany him was general. But Jim Gordon objected.

"There will be too many of us," he said. "Half will suffice, and I will select those to go."

The truth must be confessed. Some in their hearts were glad they were not going, and accepted Jim's rejection without demur. It was one thing to be brave in the open and against human foes, and another to face the gloomy horrors of that subterranean way.

Jim made another arrangement, that was acknowledged to be a good one. He sent on Martin with the main body first, remaining behind with Morse a sufficient time to allow all to get through the more difficult part of the journey ere they started. His object was of course to keep Morse fresh for the really desperate attempt he was about to make.

Changeling carried the stoutish post that was to be driven into the soil of the cavern, and the wooden "beetle," a huge kind of mallet, and other requisites were divided among voluntary porters. Lights in plenty were taken, and food for a mid-day meal.

Jim gave the main party an hour, which he passed with Morse in talking over their other island affairs. He knew that all attempts to dissuade him from his project would be of no avail, and wasted no more breath upon it.

When the time came for starting he announced it quietly, and the two friends entered the castle.

The initial part of the journey, once not without its uncanny terrors, was as nothing now in Jim's eyes. He had one faint hope left, and that was when they reached the cavern they would hear the dread sound of the falling cataract.

But he was doomed to be disappointed. When he and Morse reached the foot of the iron ladder they instinctively stood still to listen. The silence was unbroken save by a faint murmur, which they knew rose from the voices of the boys floating up through the open door below.

"All is well so far," said Morse. "Jim, this will be a red-letter day in my life."

"Or a black-letter one in mine," thought Jim, but he did not speak his fear aloud.

They hastened down and entered the lower cavern, where the lights carried by the boys sparkled like red stars in the distance.

A few minutes sufficed to bring them to the chasm, from which the early arrivals stood at a respectable distance.

Martin and Changeling were testing the post which they had fixed in the ground. All it wanted was a fairish amount of firmness, because such experienced men would take good care to keep the rope wrapped round the lower part of it, and thus cause very little strain.

At the same time it was essential that it should not give way at a critical moment.

"There," said Martin, giving the top of it a final blow with the beetle, "I think it will do."

"Very well indeed," replied Morse, as he slung a small bag the blacksmith handed to him, over his shoulders. "Now you may hook on."

Bidding all stand back so as to give his arm full play, Martin coiled the portion of the rope to which the hook was now attached, like a lasso, while Changeling wound the lower end round the post.

"One, two, and away!" sang out Martin, as he first swayed then flung the hook.

It struck the top of the mushroom-shaped rock on the other side, and slipping off, tumbled into the chasm.

As it struck the rocky sides, it emitted a sound that might have been given out by a monster tuning-fork, and the depths below taking up the note, echoed and re-echoed it softly, loudly, musically, and with discordant twang, until it died away in unknown regions below.

The group of boys, standing as silent as frightened mice, listened awe-stricken. Martin hauled up the hook.

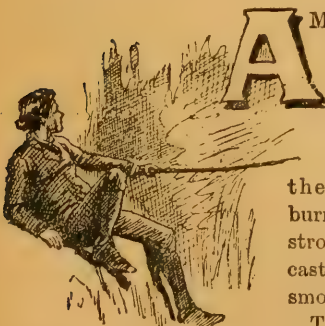
"You hardly tried then, did you?" said Morse, softly.

"I won't miss this time," replied the blacksmith. "That music below is more than I can bear."

He raised the hook again, twirled it over his head, and cast it carefully. It caught on and held fast.

CHAPTER CCXXVI.

THE DARING OF MORSE.—THE VOICE OF THE CAVERNS.



AMONG the boys there were about a dozen lights. Some were candles, but others were torches manufactured by Morse for the occasion. They burned freely, giving a strong illumination, but casting off very little smoke.

The latter were not lighted until the maker arrived, and now by their light Jim looked at Morse's face, and saw to his infinite pain that it was deadly pale. The strain upon his nervous system was undoubtedly very great.

"Oh, that he would give up the idea even now," thought Jim, but he said not a word aloud. Morse was very sensitive to ridicule, and failure to him was

unbearable. Having gone so far there was no going back to one of his really proud spirit.

The rope was pulled taut and secured round the post. Changeling took charge of the loose end. Then the second rope was fixed under the armpits of the daring young adventurer, and sufficient paid out to enable him to get across. Finally, the end of that was also wound round the post, and Martin prepared to pay out the free portion as Morse travelled along.

The silence among the boys was profound. They did not stir. They scarcely breathed. Excitement chilled them. Steadily Morse swung himself upon the rope, and, with his body hanging horizontally under it, proceeded to work his way across, hand over hand. There was a slight stir among the boys.

"Be still, all of you," whispered Jim.

He looked again at Morse, and saw that his eyes were closed and his lips set. There was a rigidity about his features that was terrible to behold. But he was midway across now, and coming back was almost as bad as going on. Jim stole up to Martin's side and prepared to assist him with the second rope in case Morse should relax his hold and fall.

But slowly and steadily he pursued his way, until he felt the rocks on the other side touch his back.

Then he drew himself up and sat down on the edge of the chasm to rest, still holding on by the main rope.

He opened his eyes and smiled.

"Not so much of a journey after all," he said.

The boys tried to cheer, but their throats were husky, and only a feeble sound came from two or three. Morse laughed softly.

"You will be able to cheer," he said, "when I get back again."

He backed a little and got upon his feet. Then he let go of the rope, and stretched as one who awakes from sleep.

Unslinging the bag he carried, he took out of it a drill and a few small packages such as they had grown familiar with. Each of them contained a mild explosive. With the drill he bored a small hole in a flake of rock, inserted one of the packages, and retreated to the stone on which the hook was fast.

The paper, by some arrangement not clear to the spectators, suddenly ignited itself, and, with a sharp report, about as loud as that of an ordinary rifle, the explosion took place.

The din of the echoes that followed was terrible to the party on the other side. Echoes came up from the depths below and from the dark hollow, from which the water in due season rushed foaming down.

Morse, in no way disturbed by the noise, walked here and there, picking up the pieces of stone detached by the explosive.

He motioned for his friends to stand clear, and tossed them one by one across the chasm. A few that were too heavy for him he did not touch.

The boys had no eyes for these results of his labours. All their attention was concentrated on Morse.

Silence restored, he went on with his blasting operation, drilling another class of rock, higher up. Shudderingly his friends watched him, and waited, with a terror they could ill conceal, the renewal of the din.

A second explosion re-awoke those awful echoes, and the gathering of broken rocks and tossing them over was repeated by the young adventurer.

So on for half a dozen times, until the nerves of the lookers-on were so fearfully shaken that many of them could bear no more, and sank quietly to a sitting position, limp with excitement.

Morse experienced no fear. On his face there was now the exultant light of the successful. He had so far accomplished all he came to do; but he now gave way to a feeling of curiosity, and excited anew the apprehensions of his friends.

Without giving any warning of his intention, he loosened the rope about his body, and allowing it to drop down, stepped out clear of it. Picking up the end, he quietly tied it to the rope that was taut. Spellbound for the moment, they could only stare at him. Then a cry burst from Jim:

"What are you going to do, Morse?"

"I am going a little way up yonder," replied Morse, pointing to the yawning darkness in the rear.

"For mercy's sake, come back now!"

"I won't go far, Jim."

He was not to be deterred, and more than one stifled groan was heard.

"This finishes me up for underground work," muttered Martin.

"Blessed if I don't feel as if my skin had turned to a lot of young eels," said Changeling.

This was such a novel, but very suggestive, description of that trying feeling known as the "creeps," that many smiled in spite of the apprehension they felt.

Morse picked out some pieces of paper from his bag, and went climbing up the rocks of the dark water-way until he was lost to view. Then a light flashed up, and they saw him standing twenty yards away from the mouth in a listening attitude.

The first light flashed up and died away. He lit another; but as it flared, a booming sound was heard in the depths of that dreadful cavern.

Morse wheeled about and came leaping down.

"The water is coming!" yelled Martin.

Without staying to put the safety-rope about him, Morse threw himself upon the main one, and entered on the journey back.

But barely had he started, when the spectators

were horrified by the terrific increase in the booming and roaring, and then came sweeping down a volume of water, bringing with it rocks and loose stones, which it bore with thunderous sound into the depths below.

Some of the startled boys turned tail and ran. A few of the lights were dropped. But Jim in pantomime called on them to stand their ground. From them he glanced at Changeling, and saw that he was holding on to the end of the rope, although he had dropped into a sitting position upon the ground.

He had adopted the expedient of closing his eyes, and his face, distorted with terror, would have made a splendid model for the gargoyle of a monastery wall.

Martin, on his knees, was creeping up to the chasm to help Morse, as soon as he was near enough, to get safely over.

How the water rushed, and roared, and plunged! It swept round the stone, on which the hook had caught with a force that threatened to tear it from its holding. It rose up in volumes of spray, as it beat against the stone. The scene was a dream of chaotic riot of the elements, for a rushing wind, coming from they knew not where, taxed the lights sorely. The candles were extinguished, and the torches, made to burn in any air, alone defied it.

Jim was overcome with anxiety for the best friend he had on earth. He could only stand by and look on.

He saw Morse fighting his way across, and could see that the horror of the time had laid hold of him. Between hope and fear, he was almost driven wild.

Suddenly he saw the hook torn away from the rock, and the rope drop down into the abyss. A cry of agony burst from his lips.

But Morse was near home at the time, and Martin had laid hold of him, and, with an effort that did infinite credit to the nerve and strength of the man, he hauled up the boy and brought him safe to land.

Then all seemed to give way utterly, and none for the moment stirred. Morse was the first to move, and stretching out his hand, he grasped that of Martin by way of thanks.

The strong man passed his other hand across his eyes. Jim went up to Morse and fairly hugged him.

Joy came to the aid of all, and although they could not make their voices heard, they expressed their pleasure in glances and congratulatory motions. Johnny Daw even danced a kind of shuffling quick-step that would have been well appreciated at an Irish festive gathering.

Jim Gordon, recovering himself, now hastened to complete their work there, so that they might get back to the light of day again.

He set the example by filling his pocket with pieces of rock or stone which Morse had thrown over, and the others followed him.

When Morse, recovering from his exhaustion, got upon his feet, there was nothing for him to do. He took Jim's proffered arm, for he had need of it; and Martin having gathered up the ropes and pitched the post into the chasm, the entire party hastened on the backward route, followed by the increasing commotion of the waters behind them.

They had their rations for dinner with them, but there was no thought of dining at that grim table by the door. On they went, and Martin, who came last, closed that door, muttering to himself a hope that it might never be opened again by man.

On they went up the stairs to the ladder, which they ascended quickly in turn until they were all through the narrow entrance.

Now they could speak and be heard, and as Martin thrust in the closing stone, by one consent they stopped.

"I made up my mind to dine in the cave," remarked Johnny Daw, glancing at Jim interrogatively.

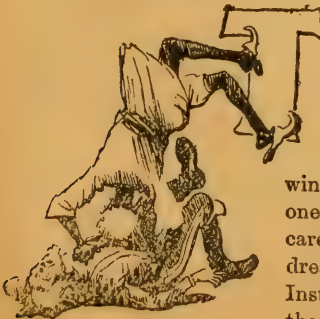
"Sit down, boys!" cried Jim, "and peg away. We are safe here. Morse, old man, you will never venture on that game again."

"I would not have ventured at all," answered Morse, quietly, "if I had known the truth. There is no season for that cataract. It was simply dammed up in some way, possibly by the fall of a portion of the cavern roof. The explosions, slight as they were, loosened the barrier. I heard the stones falling when I got into the darkness. That was what I was listening to. The moment I realised what was the matter, I turned and bolted for my life. It was a close shave, and would have been closer still but for Martin, whom I can't thank enough."

"Don't mention it," returned Martin. "We have come out of the job much better than I expected. Here's your good health!"

CHAPTER CCXXVII.

A TERRIBLE COMBAT.—GIUSEPPO GOES TO MINORCA AGAIN AND BRINGS BACK STARTLING NEWS.



HEY could talk lightly now and laugh as they ate and pledged each other in some of the "Cagliula"

wine and water. But not one there felt he would care to set foot in that dread cavern below again. Instinctively they avoided the subject of the recent

adventure, leaving it for discussion in the more invigorating air of the Long House. None there would

have been tempted by the offer of a thousand pounds to repeat the doings of the day.

Morse carried on him still signs of the strain there had been on his nerves. What he had suffered, especially on his return journey, the world would never know, for he was not one to speak of these things.

They were glad to get back to the light of day, and as Morse shut down the trap-door in the old laboratory, many there breathed a vow not to return to those dismal caves save under compulsion.

The process of turning out their pockets filled with shattered stones was now gone through with. Not until then did they realise the beauty of them. They glistened like the most precious stones on the side where they had been broken away, but on the side over which the water used to run they were smooth and perfectly polished.

In all, there was sufficient to fill half a bushel measure, and the shades and colours varied more than they had appeared to do when seen within the gloomy cave.

But of all there not one piece was familiar. They could give no known name to any of the fragments, and Morse's eyes glistened as he surveyed his prize.

"Can you guess what they are?" asked Jim.

"Not for certain," was the answer, "but I consider them worth the risk. You can leave me here to convey them to my laboratory."

They offered to assist him, but he declared he would rather do the work himself, "as he felt in an idle mood, and trotting up and down would just suit him."

So they left him and returned to the Long House, where they had been looked for with expectancy. Tidings of the day's doings were eagerly asked for, and narrators were, of course, in plenty. Jim and Ganthony, however, were not among them.

Jim wanted to have a chat with Giuseppe, who was down in the lagoon doing something to the "Condor," and Joe offered to accompany him.

As they were sauntering down the path, a most unearthly noise reached them. They stopped short, and discovered that it came from the direction of Chorker's new home.

First of all there was a gasp, then a groan, and lastly a cry of expostulation.

"What is the matter there?" exclaimed Ganthony.

"Let us creep up quietly and see," said Jim.

They did so, and presently got near enough to see the origin of the series of sounds.

Chorker was lying upon the ground, much dishevelled and cowed by the Missing Link, who was treating him in a most extraordinary manner. He did not kick or strike him, but stepped back a few paces, ran forward, and springing into the air, came down upon him like a diver, head first. And every time he

pitched upon the wretched Chorker he made him gasp, the groan naturally followed, and the expostulation was to be looked for.

"Oh, lor!" he cried, as the Link went through his performance again, "don't I say I gives in? I'm done. There ain't no more fight in me. Will you drop it? Oh, oh!"

Then he roared out something that sounded like an anathema on the ignorance of the Link who "couldn't understand English." But it was cut short by another skip and a dive.

"We had better stop it," said Jim, after looking on a while with mixed emotion.

He came out from behind the tree where he had concealed himself, and the Missing Link espying him, abandoned his performance and favoured him with a series of bows and skips, which were so many acts of hypocritical deference. Of that there was little doubt. Jim looked at him sternly until he ceased his antics and subsided into a prostrate position on the ground.

"Now," said Jim, addressing Chorker, "perhaps you will explain what this all means."

Chorker's story began with the loss of the pork, the well-picked bone, and drifted into what had happened within the last quarter of an hour.

"He come back as brassy as you please," said Chorker, "and when I axes him what he means by his tricks, he butts me in the stomach, and over I goes. Then he dives and bangs all the breath out of my body. You see him do it, sir?"

"And you did not touch him at all?"

"Well, Mister Gordon, not to lie to you, for truth is a beautiful thing wherever found, I *did* give him just one kick."

"No more?"

"Now I comes to think on it, on the himpulse of the moment, I gives him a second."

"Fetch me that bone," said Jim.

Chorker limped into the hut and brought it out.

A barer bone was never seen. It was a masterpiece of clean picking.

Jim gave the Missing Link a light rap on the head with it, and as he raised his head, motioned for him to rise. The bone being shown to him, he gazed at it as a curiosity brought to his notice for the first time. But Jim would have none of his nonsense, and he administered a smart rap on the nose with it to the Link.

"Look here," said Jim, holding up the bone, "we don't allow thieves to stop here. See this?" He drew out his revolver and held it up. The Link inspected it with strained interest. "You rob your companion again, and there will be an end to you."

The Missing Link grasped the meaning of his words. Of that there could be no doubt. The

solemnity of his countenance bordered on the ludicrous. Tears of repentance stood in his eyes.

"And you, Chorker," advised Jim, "mind how you treat this old savage. There is no knowing what fiendish tricks he may be up to when angered. Don't rouse him."

With this parting piece of advice Jim went on with Ganthony.

Jim's visit to Giuseppe was for the purpose of consulting him on the advisability of another trip being taken to Minorca. There was much disquieting matter in the last batch of letters received, and as another mail was about due he was anxious to get it if possible. Giuseppe was willing to go, and he assured Jim that there was no danger.

"We have Lucia di Valo for a friend," he said, significantly, "and the governor is of clay."

"Well, if there is no risk for you," said Jim, "I shall be glad if you will go."

"Risk!" exclaimed Giuseppe, snapping his fingers, "I can laugh at them all. But there is none."

"When will you sail?"

"At once, senor. It is as well not to lose time when one has work to do."

His own felucca was lying handy, and all he wanted was a little food and wine, which Jim promised to send down by Romeo.

He returned to the castle, and Romeo was despatched with a well-filled basket. When he returned he announced that Giuseppe was already on his way.

Jim's disquieting thoughts were not a matter of recent acquisition, but a slow growth of many weeks. All through the winter they had been more or less with him, and of late they had become as strong as the vision of a prophet. The only confidant he had was Morse, who shared them with him, but they had come to no decision as yet how to act in the emergency they had reason to fear.

Jim did not do more than announce that Giuseppe was gone for letters, and nobody but Morse saw anything unusual in it. He, however, understood the portent of it, and had a private talk with Jim.

"Do you think that any movement will take place?" he asked.

"I have thought it likely," replied Jim, "but if there is nothing more disturbing by this mail, I shall begin to breathe freely again."

They talked for awhile, but the matter of their conversation we will leave for the present. Its nature will soon be apparent.

Giuseppe was absent two days and two nights, and then he returned unharmed, and with a small bag of letters and papers.

For Jim there was nothing, and it is with one letter only that we need concern ourselves. It was received by Joe Ganthony, and came from his father. The

contents being of a very portentous nature to our island boys, we give it in full:

"MY DEAR SON,—As I hinted to you in my former letters, a feeling of uneasiness has been in my breast for some time. I am not satisfied that all is well with the school. The tone of your letters, though hopeful enough, betrays that there is something hidden from me. It appears, also, that this conviction has arisen in the minds of others who have confided their boys to the care of Mr. Farrell.

"I sought his agent here, and the interview I had with him deepened the feeling. The man is reticent, and repudiates all responsibility, but he gave me a list of the addresses of the parents and guardians of the boys still upon the island, and I communicated with them with the object of having a meeting and discussing the important subject of your welfare. The response was not general, but enough of us met to come to a decision on an advisable course of action. In about a month Mr. Terry, Mr. Trimmer, and myself, accompanied by a guide connected with Haze's Tourist Company, intend to visit your island to see with our own eyes how things are. If satisfactory, well and good. If not, we shall insist on the school being broken up, and arrangements will be made to convey the boys home.

"We shall come armed with the necessary authority from parents and guardians to enforce this decision, and also with a warrant to arrest Mr. Farrell, if, as we believe, the conditions of our agreement have not been carried out; in other words, if we find we have been the victims of fraud."

"Your affectionate father,

"JOSEPH GANTHONY."

Joe read this epistle to himself first with a feeling of dismay. Then, as in duty bound, he read it aloud to all assembled in the room.

"Morse," said Jim, "this is what we feared. We can resist an armed foe, but we cannot fight our parents and friends. What is to be done?"

"We must call a general meeting and talk it over," replied Morse. "Let it be held this afternoon, as I believe this is a case for prompt action."

"We have a month," said Joe Ganthony.

"A month is mentioned," answered Morse, "but that is a blind. They mean to surprise us, and may be here to-morrow."

CHAPTER CCXXVIII.

THE GENERAL MEETING.—A COURSE OF ACTION
DECIDED ON.



WEDDED, as it were, to their life upon the island, the reading of the letter to Ganthony filled their young bosoms with apprehension. Not a boy but would have felt his removal as a bitter deprivation of many of the true joys of life.

"I think that your father is a bit of a meddler," said Lal Brodie to Ganthony.

"He has been thinking as others have done," replied Joe.

"He ought to have his head punched," growled Stiff.

"Punching his head," said Joe, "would require a man to get through with it. He stands six-feet-two in his stockings, and is well built all round. An exchange of punches might be in his favour."

"My dad is six feet," remarked Terry.

"So is mine," added Trimmer.

"A nice lot of giants to send along here," said Pesketh. "I can see how it is. At the meeting they were selected as the best of the grumbling lot for a row."

It was a certain thing that three such men would, in more senses than one, bring weight with them. And it was equally sure, judging from Mr. Ganthony's letter, that the present life upon the island would not be by them approved of. And it was likewise certain that the boys were bitterly averse to be taken away now that there seemed a prospect of a peaceable and enjoyable time.

The Long House was in a ferment. And when the time of meeting came—it was called for four o'clock—they were all there in the stockade. Martin, Changeling, and Trueberry were also in attendance by special request.

The assembly was in the dining-room, which held them all comfortably. Jim was called to the chair, and having briefly reviewed the position, he invited any of them to come forward with a suggestion.

But none came forward, and such suggestions as they made from their seats were of a most impracticable nature. They included shutting themselves up in the Long House and defying everybody, hiding away in the vaults of the castle—they fought shy of the caves even in suggestion—or scattering about like little pigs loose from the sty. Presently the nail was hit on the head by Dawson, who rose and said:

"Boys, you are talking a lot of twaddle—mere wash. It is plain that you cannot get yourselves out of the hobble. Whom then can you rely upon? Why, Gordon and Morse. They will do it, if it is to be done."

"Jim has a suggestion to make," said Morse. "It is his own, and I approve of it."

Then Jim got up to make it, and was hailed with cheers like another general come to the relief of Lucknow.

"Boys," he said, "there are three things we must not do: defy our friends, leave them in a worry about us, or consent to be taken off the island. Query, then, how are we to work matters so that all these objectionable courses may be avoided? I will put my plan before you, and it will be by your votes that it will be carried or rejected. As I am a poor speaker

I have this day jotted down the heads of my proposition, which I will read out to you."

He drew a paper from his pocket, unfolded it, and read slowly, and with emphasis:

"Our present home and the castle to be promptly abandoned." (Murmurs of dismay.)

"To leave this side of the island, and take up our abode in that wonderful old city on the other side of it." (Expressions of a more hopeful nature were now heard.)

"All heavy bedding and furniture to be packed away in the castle, and the place secured against intrusion. Morse undertakes to see to that. Arms, ammunition, and our store of food to be taken on the sledges.

"The Long House to be left empty save of the roughest furniture, embracing the dining-room and kitchen-tables. On the former I propose to leave a letter explaining that we are all well and happy, but are so much in love with our island life that we would rather not yet be taken home." (Loud cheers hailed this suggestion.)

"That Mr. Farrell be informed of our intention to leave here, and the choice of going with us be left to his discretion. That he be not informed of our destination until he gets there.

"That the same offer be made to Chorker and his friend the Link.

"That we begin to move at once, and all minor arrangements not mentioned here be left to myself to see to.

"That Johnny Daw and his men be invited with our own men to accompany, but that it be left to their free choice.

"That is all," said Jim, as he refolded the paper, "and now, if any of you have anything to say in objection to the scheme, now is your time. I ought to say that any here who wishes to go home can remain in the Long House to meet the coming party, and that we rely upon them as old friends and brothers in time of trouble and joy, not to betray us."

Then the voting began. It was all over in three minutes. All were for the scheme in its entirety and detail. Not a dissentient vote.

Then Johnny Daw, and Cobble, and Smith, who had absented themselves as being merely guests, were invited to come in to give their decision.

"With you, of course," they said. And that was the answer of Martin, Trueberry, and Changeling.

And then Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo were called, and informed of what had been decided on—rather a waste of breath, as they had been listening at the door.

"Marse Gordon," said Romeo, "on de half ob my frens and self me say yes. We am wif you trough eberywhar."

"Barring de imperence ob him speaking for us," said Macbeth, "dat am de recision ob all ob us."

Thus was the scheme of migration decided on, and preparations for it were begun right away.

CHAPTER CCXXIX.

THE EXODUS FROM THE LONG HOUSE.



NOW that it was found necessary to evacuate the Long House, the promptitude with which the occupants became reconciled to the coming change would have been surprising to most people not students of human

nature.

Had the idea been mooted a month before, simply as a suggestion for a change, it would have been received with anger and scorn.

But arising as it did from the sheer force of necessity, it was accepted without demur. Nay, more, the notion of being on the move was hailed with delight.

There was the journey through the woods, and the promised excitement of exploring that strange city, of which only a few of them had really seen anything, and above all there was the delightful sense of doing something, not exactly wrong, but in an independent spirit that might get them, in a mild way, into trouble.

The three sons of the fathers who were expected had, it is true, an alloy to their joy. They were each blessed with parents who, in the plain language of boyhood, "stood no nonsense." By-and-by they would have to render an account of their conduct to them, and when they thought of it they grimaced and sighed.

"We must look upon ourselves as being sacrificed to a good cause," remarked Terry, as the trio discussed this matter.

"We shall be martyrs," replied Ganthony, "let us look upon ourselves how we may."

"When my governor gets in a rage," said Trimmer, gloomily, "a tornado is a zephyr-like breeze to him."

But they must either be martyrs or accept the alternative suggested by Jim—give themselves up when the fathers arrived. That they felt they could not do.

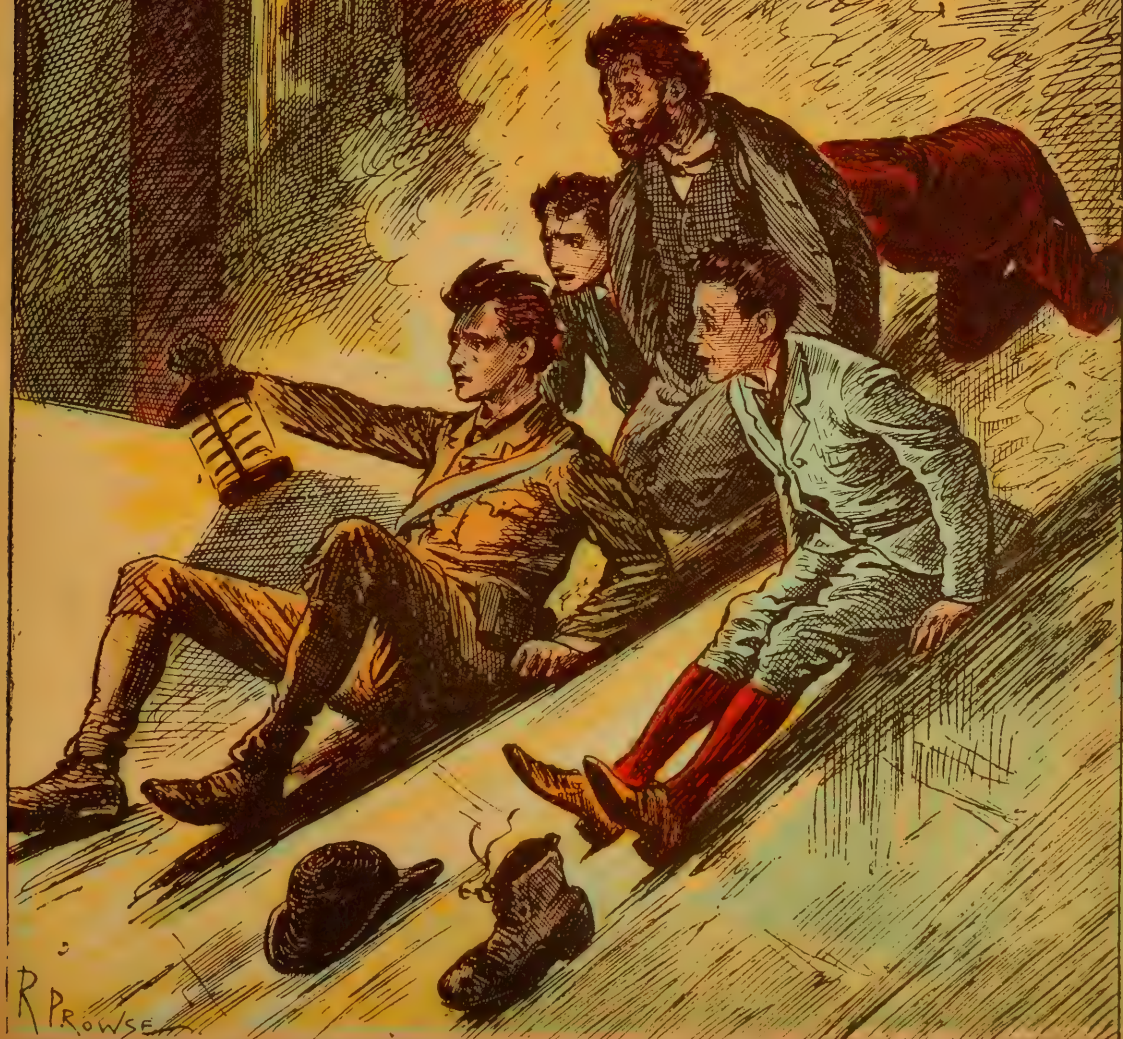
"We must stand or fall by the rest," said Terry. "And now let us go and make ourselves useful."

It was decided to take with them all the fowls, and the calf, and the little pigs, which were growing up and were indeed already excellent porkers as to size.

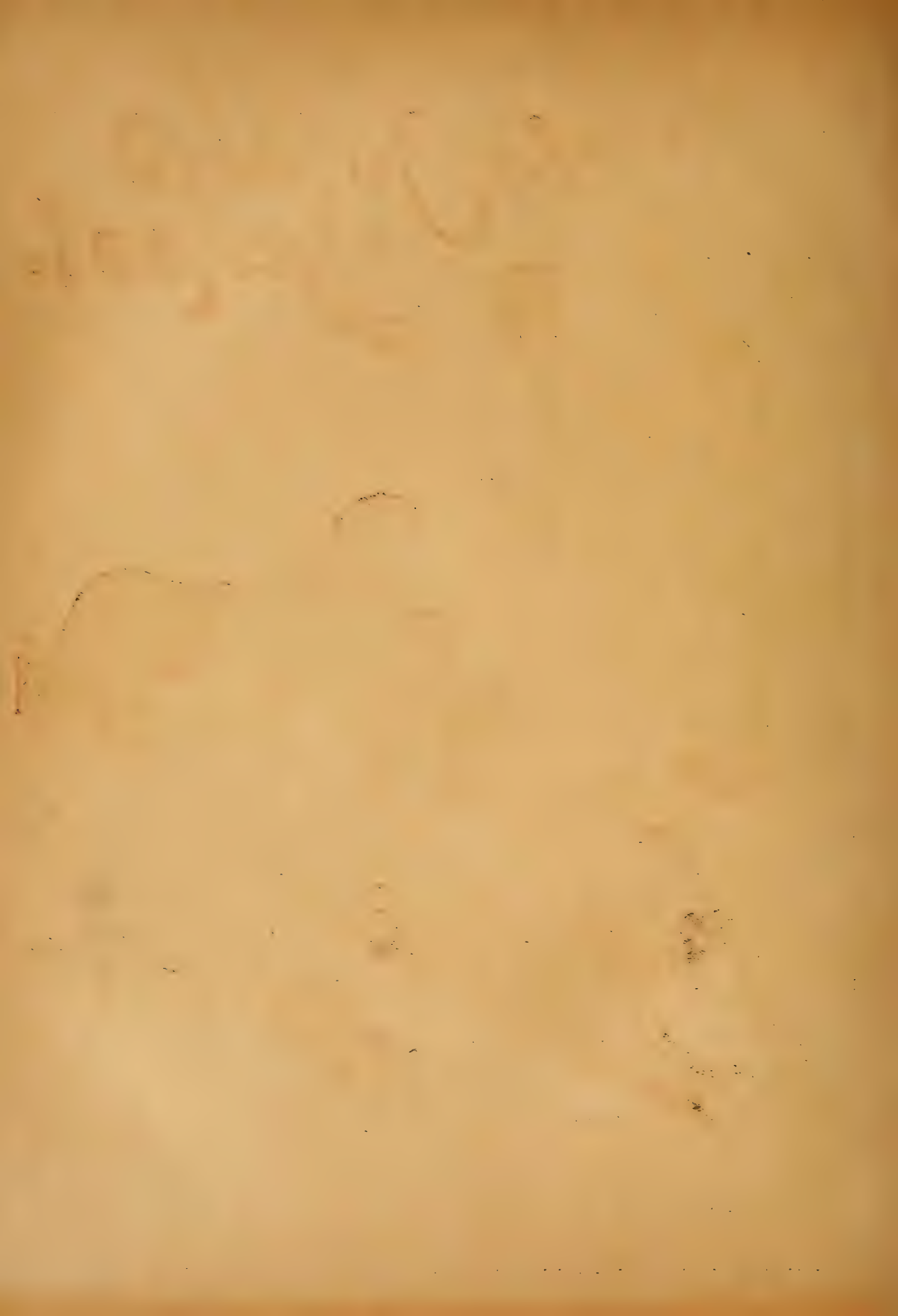
AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.

The Island School.



Suddenly the flooring tilted up, and down they went with a rush, increasing in velocity every moment until the pace was really terrific.



Romeo was sure that with a proper allowance of rope he could drive them through the wood, and his grandfather undertook to see to the calf. The fowls would have to be carried in coops upon the sledges, half a score extra ones being made for them and other things.

The work was hurried on because time was considered precious. All day long a watch was kept from the tower of the castle for any suspicious vessel that might appear in the offing. If necessary the boys were resolved to fly without the necessities of life, and take their chance of a wild life in the woods.

No intimation of their intention was given to Chorker, it being reserved for the very last moment: but Jim felt it was only right that the Farrells should be early made acquainted with the necessity of a change.

He walked over one evening when the preparations were far advanced, and in a brief way laid a portion of his project before them. He told them of the necessity of making a new home, if only temporarily, and explained the possible peril of Mr. Farrell if the party came and found him in the chine.

This set the wretched man in a flutter, and he was for departing at once. But Mrs. Farrell declared that there was no necessity for going at all.

"We should only hamper the movements of you boys," she said; "and we can get along if you leave us a small store of provisions. But if Mr. Farrell thinks it advisable to go with you he had better do so."

"Surely," pleaded her husband, "you will not desert me in the hour of need?"

"We are not deserting you," she said; "if you like to remain we can hide you when these people come along. They are not the men to hurt us."

"I think I will remain and protect you," said Mr. Farrell; "as a husband and father I do not feel justified in leaving you unprotected."

That was *his* way of admitting that he would be safer and more comfortable with his wife. He asked that he might have his rifle restored to him, and Jim promised to send it along with a small quantity of ammunition.

As he was not likely to come again before leaving, he took leave of them all, not without some qualms about Eveline's safety, but she was in the best of spirits.

"By the way," said Jim, at the last moment, "I can give you an additional protector, Mrs. Farrell. Will you have Charley with you?"

"I shall be very pleased," was the reply, that checked a strenuous objection on Mr. Farrell's lips.

"He will not interfere with you if you are kind to him," remarked Jim; "I assure you, Mr. Farrell, that

Charley is without ferocity unless treated unjustly. Try your hand at making friends with him."

"I am not, of course, afraid of the beast," replied Mr. Farrell, "provided he does not attack me unawares."

"I can promise you that he will not attack you at all unless you begin the fight. Romeo shall bring him over in the morning."

Eveline absented herself from the room shortly before Jim left, but she came back again in time to bid him good-bye. As he gave her his hand, he felt a note she pressed into it, and he slipped the misative into his pocket ere he shook hands with the last of the house, Miss Elegantine.

"I hope," she said, "you will not allow my precious Oscar to get into trouble."

"He will be well looked after," replied Jim, vaguely.

He went away rather sore at heart, for, truth to tell, he felt a presentiment that it would be many a day ere he saw them again. Clear of the house, he hastened out of the chine, and slowing down in his walk, brought out Eveline's note. There was not much in it. He could hardly expect it, with the little amount of time at her command.

"MY DEAR JIM,—I like the courage of you all in going away, but it is not exactly right in the way, I suppose. When Mr. Terry and the other gentlemen arrive I shall tell them how brave and good you have been. Give my love to the boys, among whom I suppose I must include you. You're very, very—*you know what*." "EVELINE."

"I am glad she takes it so, and on the whole it is a good thing they have elected to remain behind."

That, in truth, was the general opinion, but the loss of Charley was not so acceptable. But, after all, the intelligent beast would be doing more good in the chine than with them, and all the arrangements made by Jim were voted to be the best possible. So the beast was sent over by Romeo.

The bedstead and many other things that were not to be taken were stored in one of the upper rooms in the castle.

Morse filled a box with certain things from his laboratory, and packed them on a sledge he was going to draw himself.

"There is nothing dangerous," he said, "because nothing is mined. But I cannot trust lucky school-boys with my precious property."

He closed the secret door, and adjusted the stone step that hid the entrance-way with the greatest care, so that he might find everything untouched, even if strangers succeeded in gaining access to the castle. To guard against the gates being forced, they were strongly barricaded, and the passages boarded over inside.

Finally, when the fowls and calf had been taken out, he closed the subway by destroying the roof, and

it was covered with earth, and weed-seeds that would grow up rapidly were sprinkled over it. Within a week there would not be left the least trace of it to the ordinary eye.

At last all was ready. Twenty-five sledges laden with food, blankets, and other necessities, five more bearing the coops filled with fowls, and one fine morning the entire body fell in ready to start.

At the last moment, Jim, having written and tacked his letter to the table to keep it from being blown away, went down to Chorker and told him that the Long House was stripped, and they found it necessary to cross the island. If he chose to follow he could do so, but if he elected to remain, he did so at his peril.

"I'm faithful to you," replied Chorker, "and will in course foller."

The Missing Link was asleep at the time, he having been out all night wandering goodness knows where, and perhaps performing some savage rites. Chorker hoped to steal away and leave him.

He could vow that his incubus had elected to remain behind. Jim did not see the Link or ask after him, but, having delivered his message, returned to the Long House and gave the word for the start.

CHAPTER CCXXX.

SOME DOINGS IN THE WOOD.—MACBETH HAS A GREAT LOSS.



FIRST went the men, headed by Martin, armed with loaded rifles, to shoot any boar that might show a disposition to be dangerous. It was the time of year when they are most savage. Next came the boys with the sledges, the toilers divided into two parties, so as to relieve each other every hour or so on the march. Behind them was Morse with his sledge, and Jim keeping him company, and last of all the three negroes with the pigs and the calf.

Hamlet volunteered, in a filial spirit, to assist his aged father with the calf. Romeo declined all offers of assistance, feeling equal to the task of driving his charges single-handed. There were now seven pigs in all, and to a hind leg of each was attached a rope. Romeo held the ends as the man belonging to the circus does the reins when he drives a number of horses through the town.

To accelerate their movements and repress tenden-

cies to rebellion, Romeo carried a long willow wand, with a short whip-lash at the end.

At first there was no trouble. The pigs made straight for the interior of the wood, but having journeyed awhile, their instincts were roused, and they began to look about for provender.

Now, for seven pigs to go the same way, much less look in the same direction, would have been an unheard-of thing. If there had been seventy of them they would have had seventy divers minds guiding their actions. Therefore Romeo's charges made an attempt to scatter, and the whip was brought into play.

"What you doing ob?" roared Romeo, "you contrymashious creeturs? Grandfader, will you get long wif dat calf so as not to rimpede de progress ob dis lot?"

"I willing 'nuff to go 'long," replied Macbeth, "but dis calf got no legs. He walk on stilts. See dat, now!"

The calf had stopped, and with its four legs slightly spread, appeared to be making an effort to root itself in the soil. All the rest had gone on out of sight, and the niggers with their charges were alone.

"Gib him a shove up, fader!" cried Romeo; "if de way blocked much longer, dese creeturs make a puzzle ob de ropes."

Hamlet put his shoulders against the haunches of the calf and pushed with all his might. He might as well have tried to shift a well-earthed-up rock.

One of the pigs walked between Macbeth's legs, wound his rope round the old man's ankle, and then suddenly rushing forward, threw him heavily.

"Gollysmash!" gasped Macbeth, "what dat for?"

"You got in de way ob purpose!" cried Romeo, as two of his charges made a dash for the rear, and he found himself, in a manner of speaking, driving all round his body. "Fader, leab orf wif dat calf and gib some of dese lily beggars a wipe ober de head."

Hamlet was only too glad to give up the fruitless task of endeavouring to get the calf along, and pigs being more open game, he picked up a stick and made a general charge upon them.

The way he went for them did him credit, but the way he missed the dodging little beggars was very exasperating. In a few brief moments he had succeeded in tangling all the cords, and enveloping the raging Romeo in a perfect maze. He had ropes round his legs, and pigs whirling about him squeaking in derision of the efforts of Hamlet to deal out well-merited punishment on their heads and hides.

But Romeo held on, even when he was at last thrown and his charges raced over him like rats over a prostrate sack of oats in a barn.

"Gib over!" he yelled to his father, "can't you see dat you dribin' de creeturs mad?"

Hamlet gave over, being out of breath, and looking round him, discovered that Macbeth and the calf had disappeared.

"Jess like him," muttered Hamlet, "neber t'ink ob anyborry but him own nigger carkus."

He assisted Romeo to rise, and between them they managed to disentangle the pigs, and shortening the hold upon the ropes, adopted the expedient of tying two legs instead of one. This gave them greater command over the obstinate brutes, and each taking his share, they managed to get them on the straight road again.

More than that, the pigs suddenly started off with their noses on the ground, like hounds upon the trail of a fox, and fairly raced after those who had gone before.

Both the negroes were winded by the time Jim and Morse appeared ahead again. On their own account the animals slowed down and conducted themselves as models of propriety.

"Marse Gordon," said Romeo, when he had recovered his breath, "how long dat confirmaceous grandfader ob mine gone on?"

"He hasn't passed us," replied Jim.

"Not pass you wif de calf?"

"No."

"Den where, in de name ob all dat drike a nigger wild, am he?"

This was a question nobody could answer, and they proceeded on their way until the halt was called at noon. By then the whole party was practically together, Macbeth alone excepted. Chorker and the Missing Link did not count.

In vain did Romeo and his father watch for the coming of Macbeth and the calf. Neither put in an appearance.

Once more a start was made, and in the same order as before they hastened on their journey travelling until nightfall was at hand, and then a halt was called for the camping and getting supper ready.

Fires were lighted, and Romeo, having tied up his charges, helped his father to cut down boughs to be used as a covering from the dew. And while they laboured their thoughts were with the absent Macbeth.

By-and-by Chorker appeared. It was growing dusk at the time. With assumed cheerfulness he humbly assisted the niggers in their labours, and respectfully asked Jim if he might sleep nigh the rest, as otherwise he might feel lonesome.

"What has become of your companion?" inquired Jim.

"Nothing would injuice him to come with me!" replied Chorker. "I begged him for to do it with tears in my hyes, but he remained obdurick. It's all on account of his not knowing English, I reckon, sir."

"If I find you have been playing any tricks you will be punished," remarked Jim, as he turned away.

Romeo and his father had a fire to themselves, and Chorker, after a most pathetic appeal to their generosity, was allowed to sit near it, smoke his pipe, and warm himself.

In the camp there was a lot of fun going on. Giuseppo sang and set off Johnny Daw in the same direction. Then Cobble discovered he had a voice, and sang a sentimental song forty verses long, all about a sailor and his lass who ended too brief a career in a watery grave together. It drew tears into the eyes of the boys, and also convulsions arising from suppressed laughter were very general.

"I never sings that 'ere song," said Cobble, when he had finished the dolorous refrain, "but I feels all the time as I had a wooden knob in my throat."

"I was thinking as I listened," said Terry, politely, "that you had something there."

"Something more in the cobweb line, I thought," said Lal Brodie.

"Or a fishbone."

"Or a piece of cocoa-nut matting."

"Or a corner off an old hair broom."

These latter suggestions came from various quarters and excited spasmodic laughter. Cobble looked about him with an amazed face.

"What there is to laugh at, I don't see, gentlemen," he said.

"Dry up," growled Smith, his brother seaman. "If you had a head with more brains in it than there is in a pulley-block, you might ha' knowed as they would larf at a song o' that sort."

"It's allus been took different by other people," urged Cobble.

"Deaf and dumb 'uns, then," muttered Smith.

"All right; I don't care," said Cobble, philosophically; "the song's a good 'un or it wouldn't ha' been sung by my father and grandfather, I suppose. If people nowadays can't see nothing in it, I can't help it!"

It was about a minute or so after the song, and the reflections upon it had ceased, that Romeo was startled by seeing a figure, walking in a corkscrew fashion, come out of the gloom of the wood. He drew his father's attention to it by digging him in the ribs, and pointing in that direction. Hamlet uttered an exclamation of pain and surprise.

"It you grandfader!" he gasped.

So it was. In the flesh, it is true, but on the verge of a collapse.

He tottered up, and, dropping down beside the fire, stared at them wild-eyed and terrible to look upon. His hand pointed to his mouth in a significant manner.

CHAPTER CCXXXI.

ON TO THE DEAD CITY.—THE PARTY COMPLETE.



HE want sumfin to drink," said Romeo. Fortunately, Jim had observed the coming of Macbeth, and as he had provided himself with a flask of the old wine to be used in such an emergency as this, he soon restored the old nigger. To come over to his side and

pour a portion of the invigorating liquid down his throat was the work of a few moments.

Macbeth rolled his eyes and found his speech.

"Dere sumfin good 'bout dat," he murmured.

"Have a little more?" inquired Jim.

"'Bout a teaspoonful, Marse Gordon," replied Macbeth.

A tablespoonful was given him as good measure, and then Jim said he could have no more, and left him.

Romeo dutifully got the old man something to eat, and waited until he had in part satisfied his hunger before he gratified his curiosity by asking about the calf.

"Blow dat calf!" replied Macbeth.

"What de marrer wif him?"

"Eberying. He wuss dan a pig. Fust he wouldn't go at all, den he start orf and wouldn't stop. Your poor old grandfader was a-trabellin' wif him right up to de middle ob de afternoon."

"Well, you muss be a fool," said Hamlet. "Why not let him go and done wif him? He soon be sorry dat he leab a good home."

"I tie him to my wrist," said Macbeth, "and not able to untie it when dat cuss not slacken it for a moment, but pull, pull, tug, tug, all de while till dese ole pegs ob mine felt like sticks ob candy, and de bone ob my arm hab de sensation ob being drawn out like a telescope. Den de rope break."

"Dat how it happen, den," said Romeo, staring at the fire. "In de futur you take warnin' not to tie yourself up to a calf."

"'Bout ole enuff to know berrer," remarked Hamlet.

"It do seem to me that it was a onreasonable thing to do," said Chorker, mildly introducing himself into the conversation.

It was like him, putting in a remark where it was not wanted. All three niggers fell upon him for his 'imperence,' and drove him from their circle.

"You sleep right away clar ob us," was their final

warning, and with a groan he drew away and lay in solitude throughout the night.

In the morning the only signs of his recent adventure exhibited by Macbeth were in the stilty way of his walking and his stooping at intervals to rub his calves and groan. There were some expressions of sorrow over the loss of the calf, but as it could not be helped, Macbeth was not blamed.

Guided by the signs of the old track through the wood, partly blotted out by wind and weather, but still distinct enough for them to see, the party proceeded on their way. A day uneventful in a narrative sense passed away, and once more they camped in the wood. At noon on the following day they stood on the outskirts of the forest and looked down upon the Dead City at their feet.

"Had it ever a name, Giuseppe?" asked Morse.

"Not that I ever heard, senor," replied the smuggler.

"Then I propose to give it one," said Morse.

"Henceforth let it be known as Gordontown."

This suggestion was received with general acclamation, and, in spite of Jim's remonstrances, by that name the town came to be known.

No longer was it to be a dead city, but to be a place alive with youth and high spirits; its long-silent streets ringing with laughter, and echoing to the quick footsteps of its new inhabitants.

As they entered it Giuseppe pointed out the gate which Morse had blown down and brought him and his men to confusion.

"It was a great shock," he said; "it gave me a jump, and I'll never forget it. We came creeping up—all so still—the gate must be pushed for us to get in—we push it—*bang!* It was great and terrible, and I alone live to tell the tale."

"You bear Morse no malice, I suppose?" said Martin, smiling.

"I love, I honour him," was the answer. "I am proud to follow him. It was a great thing for me to escape alone, and afterwards to be spared. It is enough. I am grateful and true."

The majority had passed through the gate, and were ranging their sledges in a line, when an exclamation of surprise from those still in the open arrested their attention. They crowded back to see what was the matter, and what they saw raised rippling laughter all round from the boys.

Chorker, in sham modest, deferential way, had lingered behind, so that he was midway between Gordontown—the new name comes trippingly from the pen—and the wood. There he had halted to look back, for the horror of his life, the Missing Link, was on his trail.

Bounding from the direction of the wood, and giving at intervals that peculiar skip which excited

the spectators to laughter, he came with his long robe lifted so as not to impede his movements. Even from afar they could see that his face was brightened with joy.

As for Chorker, he stood like one turned to stone, or as Frankenstein might have done when he saw the monster approaching him just when he was hoping he was free from the dread presence for ever.

The Missing Link was speedily upon him, and fairly skipped into the air as he threw his arms about Chorker's neck.

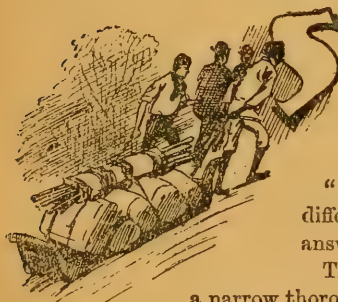
This was resented, of course, and the struggling of one to hold on and the other to get free caused roars of merriment.

But all things come to an end sooner or later, and the Missing Link released Chorker, and fell in by his side, smiling upon him in a way that was even more aggravating than the more fervent demonstration.

"Our party is complete now," said Jim; "forward, boys."

CHAPTER CCXXXII.

CHOOSING THEIR HOMES.—THE ANCIENT HALL OF JUSTICE.



"SOMEHOW," said Jim, "the place looks brighter than it did the last time we were here."

"We came under different circumstances," answered Morse.

They were walking up a narrow thoroughfare, now for the first time discovered, that wound here and there, but mainly bore towards the centre of the city. It was paved with a curiously-marked marble of many colours, broken here and there, but easy-going otherwise. The sledges were transported up it without any very great effort.

The houses on either side were for the most part closed, but here and there a door had fallen in, disclosing a dark passage within. Though there was some curiosity to explore the interiors, Jim permitted no halting.

"On to the square," he said; "we can leave those minor places for another day."

So they went on, up and up, until they arrived at a short flight of steps, and beyond it was the square. It was in the heart of the place, and of the size of one of the minor squares in London—say Berkeley Square. In the centre stood a fountain, which, to their utter amazement, was playing.

The jet it cast up was not very great, nor did it rise very high—ten feet at the most—but it performed the function of filling a basin below, from which the overflow ran down a stone gutter to a hole a few feet away, where it disappeared.

"The question of water-supply," said Morse, "which I must confess, has kept me thinking on the way, is answered."

"How do you account for it, sir?" asked Martin.

"I will look into it another time," was the answer.

The boys were thirsty with their climb and the heat of the day, and crowding round, they tasted the water. It was cool, sweet, and pure.

Next their attention was turned to the buildings around, all solid and well built, and in many instances with pretensions to architectural beauty. One huge mansion at the upper end was of imposing elegance, being faced with many-coloured stones, and inlaid with great taste. The entrance was open, but from where they stood it was not easy to see if the doors were in their places or not.

Jim proposed to go forward and explore it. He was accompanied by Martin and Giuseppe. Morse remained behind with the rest, who threw themselves down upon the marble pavement round the fountain, not at all averse to a rest.

Three broad steps led up to the building, and, on ascending them, Jim and his attendants discovered the two doors of solid bronze, covered with fantastic designs, lying inside.

Whether they had been forcibly removed from the hinges, or simply fallen from neglect, was not clear. They lay apart so that there was a way between them, and the trio entered a hall lighted by holes in the roof, glazed with something that looked at first like glass, but afterwards proved to be thin sheets of crystal-like stone.

Ten huge pillars of bronze supported the roof. At the upper end there was a raised platform of stone, and on it a seat, that may in ancient times have served for the seat of a powerful judge or a monarch.

The floor was almost covered with dust and leaves, that had been brought there by the wind, but where there were clear places it was seen to be of splendid mosaic work.

"Senor," said Giuseppe, breathlessly, "this was a great place long ago."

"It beats all I ever saw," murmured Martin.

Jim said nothing for the next minute or so. His eye was taking in the details of the marvellous place, and he was wondering what manner of people had been its occupants, and why it had remained so long practically unknown to the world.

"How is it," he said at last, "that nothing is known of this wonderful palace, as I may call it?"

"Senor," said Giuseppe, "it was the curse that kept

people from it, and its grandeur was forgotten as generation succeeded generation."

"But the ordinary explorer would not heed a curse," said Jim.

"Senor," said Giuseppe, "it was dangerous for any explorer to come here among the people. They were a jealous lot, one family, as it were, and the stranger who came *remained*."

"That is the only solution of it," admitted Jim.

Passing through the hall, they found there were rooms behind the judgment-seat, as it came to be called, all built and ornamented, as to the walls, on the same magnificent lines. But of furniture there was none, and the peculiarity was that the building was all on one floor.

The roof was lower in the inner chambers, but the method of lighting was the same. In two of them there were huge hearths, with overhanging mantels of stone, rich enough in carving to drive all the members of the Archæological Society stark, staring mad with delight.

"It seems almost a desecration," said Jim; "but one of these must be made the kitchen and the other a store-room. I propose to live here myself with Morse and a few friends."

"And the other senors," said Giuseppe—"is it for them to choose their abode in the square?"

"Precisely. Now we will return and make our wishes known"—Jim smiled as the word "our" escaped his lips. "I was thinking of the king who might once have lived here," he explained.

They sauntered back to the fountain, where they found the rest in the delightful state of laziness supposed to be induced by lotus-eating.

The appearance of Jim roused them from their dreamy repose, and his arrangements being known, and of course acquiesced in, Martin was desired to show the boys with the sledges where to take their contents to. The fowls were excepted, naturally, and the pigs also; Romeo being desired to look out a suitable place for them.

Soon all were on the move, and Jim, with Morse alone, remained seated on the side of the fountain.

"I have not asked you, Jim," said the latter, "what you wrote in the letter you left behind."

"We agreed upon its purport, didn't we?" hinted Jim.

"Undoubtedly; but you may have put something in on your own account."

"Well, I did pop in a few words to the effect that some of us would resist being removed from this island."

"Was that discreet?"

"It was to the point. Whatever happens, if they choose to seek us, they cannot say they were not warned."

"That is something."

"They have no right, these three men, to come here to upset us," said Jim, hotly; "it is the one chance of our lives for tasting what real freedom means, and I don't want it spoiled."

"Parents take a different view of the matter, of course," replied Morse. "Now, about this fountain. I think I have hit upon the way it is supplied. We are lower than yonder wood, and also below the high lands near the coast. It is simply a matter of keeping it open to various springs."

"It was not playing when we were here before."

"It is playing now," said Morse, "and with that let us be content. Perhaps it was temporarily choked up, or it may be a matter of the season. Anyway, we need not worry. Whom will you have to live with you?"

"Yourself, for a start——"

"I have my chemicals, you know,"

"All right. You will not make a fool of yourself and fragments of us with them. Terry, Martin, Giuseppe, and Ganthony will fill the bill, I reckon, and the others can sort themselves at their convenience."

CHAPTER CCXXXIII.

SETTLING DOWN.—CHORKER AGAIN GETS INTO TROUBLE.



HOOSING a home is to most people a delightful occupation, worrying, in a sense, perhaps, if one doesn't find what one wants; but when there is a variety to pick and choose from, it is not so. The boys' wants were simple, they were not bothered

with furniture, and they had a whole square of buildings at their disposal.

After the inspection of the Hall of Justice, as it eventually came to be called, they scattered about in parties and selected their abiding-places. One general arrangement was, however, imperative, and that was in connection with the meals. As Macbeth and his two descendants had their kitchen in the back part of the Hall of Justice, there the food would have to be partaken of.

And of the outer hall they made a dining-room, Sleery undertaking, with a little assistance, to knock up a long table and seats that would serve their purpose.

Night had come when all the preliminaries had been

decided upon, and it was a night the boys long remembered for its beauty.

They sat on the steps by the entrance, inhaling the soft, balmy air, and gazing at one of those brilliant starlit skies of which they never tired. They talked in soft tones, so that down by the fountain, where Chorker and the Missing Link were modestly camping, their voices had sunk to a murmur. Nobody had insisted on Chorker holding so far aloof, but remembering Jim's warning down by the Long House, he did not venture up to the neighbourhood of the rest.

As for the Missing Link, he was in a playful mood, quite boyish, and amused himself by dabbling his hands in the water of the tank of the fountain. Then he took to walking upon the stone edging, and finally fell into the water, just as naughty boys in the story-books do, and after that he sobered down.

As yet Chorker had not chosen a home, and as he lay upon his back, trying to get to sleep, he reflected on the matter, and decided that it would be prudent to pick one outside the square.

The Missing Link walked about to dry his clothes, and finally vanished down the lower part of the square. Chorker fell asleep, to be awakened again by the chattering of the boys, as, with their sleeping-rugs and things upon their shoulders, they sought their respective homes.

He saw the outlines of their forms as they passed through the open doors—some were closed against them, but no attempt had been made to force them—and when all had vanished, a sense of unutterable loneliness came over him. He felt that he could not sleep in the open air with no companion. Solitude in that place would be unendurable. Even the Missing Link would have been welcome society, but he had vanished.

"I must get into some sort of place with a roof over my head," Chorker muttered, as he got upon his feet. "If ever there was an unfortunate man, it's me!"

He walked down the square in the direction taken by the Missing Link, and came to an open thoroughfare with a precipitous descent. The houses were like steps, the roof of one being many feet lower than the other.

He observed that they were meaner houses than those in the square, save one towards the bottom, which had a superior appearance. The door was wider than the rest, and there was some stone carving on the front, whereas the rest were perfectly plain.

"Here's the crib for my money," muttered Chorker. "With so many houses Jack can be as good as his master."

There was something pleasant in that thought, and it lightened his gloom in a very appreciable degree. He passed through the open door, and stood in a small ante-chamber. Its limits could be seen in the

dim light. Also the oblong square of an inner doorway opposite. He wondered if the Missing Link had found his way there, and called upon him by the name of "warmint" to show himself.

But the "warmint" not appearing, he pegged across the ante-room and dived through the open doorway. For a while he walked on a level, and then, to his horror, the floor seemed to tilt up, and he felt himself sliding down.

He uttered a roar for help that roused a horrible rumbling immediately ahead of him, and, in an agony of fear, he threw himself down.

The floor seemed to tilt more and more. In vain he tried to stop himself. There was nothing to clutch at, and the stone pavement was horribly smooth.

On he went at the speed of a railway train going down a steep gradient. Quicker and quicker; his breathing became impeded—he could no longer cry out for help.

He thought of many things at once, and all in a moment. Then he felt what a wicked, worthless wretch he had been, and was horribly fearful. But not for long.

Suddenly he seemed to shoot clear of the floor and go down into infinite space. The horror of it was too much for him, and he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER CCXXXIV.

A GREAT DISCOVERY.—THE VAULT OF TEN THOUSAND
PILLARS.



RAINSTONE, Dibble, and Dawson, turning out very early in the morning—they were positively the first to awake—discovered the Missing Link sleeping like a very ugly child by the fountain, but Chorker was not there.

Not knowing why he should be absent, and in a general way indifferent to his welfare, they merely stayed a few moments to contemplate the unexampled hideousness of the sleeper, and then sauntered on.

"Nobody up yet," said Dibble. "What shall we do with ourselves?"

"Wake up the others," suggested Dawson.

"And so get our heads punched! No, thank you."

"Let us have a stroll round the streets," said Rainstone.

"It's a bit of a creepy place," said Dibble, "and we must mind where we poke our noses into."

"Jim was saying as much last night," remarked

Dawson, with a yawn; "anyway, there can be no harm in going down *one* street, if we keep in the middle of it."

"Let us try this," said Rainstone.

It was the street down which Chorker had gone to meet with his terrible adventure, destined to be of more import to the boys than was apparent on the surface.

Dawson and Dibble assenting, they started on their short journey of inspection.

The houses, though plainer and more meagre than those of the square, were not by any means shoddy. They were built of stone, and solidly constructed. Windows were few, and the glazing was of the same nature as that of the Hall of Justice.

The boys halted to inspect one of the lower windows, and they marvelled at its materials.

"It looks to me," said Rainstone, "as if for glass a thin shaving had been cut off an enormous ruby. How could they manage it, and from whence came the stone?"

"Morse has some of the same colour, but brighter," said Dibble; "part of his finding in the cavern."

"I never think of that venture," remarked Dawson, "without feeling as if my ankles were giving way for good. I wonder if Morse ever dreams of it?"

"Not he," said Dibble, contemptuously; "when a thing is over and done with, he doesn't worry. His mind is always busy with his inventions and manufactures."

They moved on, trying some of the doors they passed, but could not stir them. There were no hinges or handles, and the way they used to be opened was not clear.

Presently they came to the house into which Chorker had wandered and met with such a startling adventure, and they went in by the open door.

Though there was but a poor means of lighting, they had daylight outside, and could see well about them.

On arriving at the mysterious shoot—if we may so call it—down which Chorker disappeared, they stopped and peered into the darkness.

"What's ahead?" asked Dibble.

"I have one of Morse's patent matches," replied Rainstone; "he gave me a few the other day, and I will light it."

He did so, and they saw before them a well-paved way, sloping slightly down, straight into some place below.

So far there was nothing terrible in it, for many similar ways are to be found in our great cities, and on a larger scale.

With the exception of its winding, the road down to the station beneath the Smithfield Market was of the same class.

"It leads into the cellars," said Dibble, in a breathless whisper.

"More than that," replied Rainstone. "Listen; I hear something below."

They all stood still, and a sound came up from below—a human voice, and it was somebody calling for help.

For a moment they were staggered, but Dawson was the first to recover himself, and despite the distance of the voice, he recognised it.

"Chorker's got down there," he said, "and can't get up again, I reckon. Let us shout to him in reply."

They all shouted together, "Chorker! Chorker!" and the roar awoke a deep, booming series of echoes below.

When these died away they listened, and Chorker was heard again. This time they distinguished the words:

"For 'iven's sake, come and help me! I'm shook to a jelly, and can't see a hinch afore my nose."

"We'll be with you soon," cried Dawson, "but must get a light. Dibble, go and see if you can find Morse. Ask for a lantern, and perhaps he will come with you. I like to have him with me when prodding about these unholy places."

He and Rainstone remained where they were, occasionally exchanging a word with Chorker, who was in a state of mortal anxiety and fear, and who seemed unable to clearly explain how he got below there.

And the distance between him and the boys was a bar to conversation, too. So there was nothing ascertained of the nature of the place, or why Chorker was unable to get out of it, until, in about twenty minutes, Dibble returned with Morse, Jim Gordon, and Martin. They had a lantern with them, which they lighted, and Martin had a coil of rope on his arm, brought with a view to contingencies.

Close behind them were a number of the other boys, but they were desired to keep outside for the present, and not block the light.

Holding the lantern high, Morse went on first, and Jim and the rest followed close behind him.

The flooring of the sloping passage was apparently solid, but when they had traversed about thirty feet of it in a direct line, it suddenly tilted up, and down they went in a body, with a rush.

Dibble yelled out, and there were exclamations of alarm from the rest, as they rushed on, increasing in velocity every moment.

Morse held on to the lantern, and held it up so that its light went before. Suddenly he saw the face of Chorker before him—a face that was the picture of long-suffering and terror—but before a word could be gasped out on either side, the whole party were upon that unfortunate old man.

He was knocked down, rolled over and over, and the lantern, turning with Morse, went out.

Then there was a stoppage, and those who had sufficient wit left to grasp what had happened, found themselves lying upon their backs upon a remarkably cool floor.

"Steady, all," Morse was heard to cry; "I have the lantern all right."

The flare of a match followed, and the lantern was relighted. Then all but Chorker got up and stared at each other in wonderment.

"That is one way of travelling," said Jim. "What do you make of it, Morse?"

"An old-fashioned shoot," answered Morse; "but what they shot down I can't tell you now."

"Get up, Chorker," said Martin, "and tell us how you got here."

"I can't say," replied Chorker.

By the light of the lantern they could see several massive stone columns hard by, but beyond them was darkness. Judging by the sound of their voices, they were in a place of considerable extent.

"It isn't a common cellar," remarked Dibble, innocently.

"It is something bigger than a cellar," said Morse. "I'll light up a little more."

He had come prepared with a supply of his illuminating matches, and he set half a dozen flaring.

By their light they could see rows and rows of vast stone columns, more ponderous than anything of the sort they had yet set eyes on, ranged in rows ahead and to the right and left.

There was no end to them to be seen by the light at their command, and when the matches expired, Morse said, with a catching of the breath:

"It is a vault with ten thousand pillars. It beats the huge underground tanks of Constantinople into fits."

CHAPTER CCXXXV.

THE GREAT STOREHOUSE.—"THE WAY IN NOT THE WAY OUT."



this place another time—to-morrow or the next day, perhaps."

EXPLORING this vast vault just then was not to be thought of. They had not sufficient ordinary lights, and, besides, none of them had had any breakfast.

"We had better go back," said Morse, "and make arrangements for a thorough exploration of

"We ain't out yet, sir," said Martin, casting an eye aloft.

The stone flooring that had tilted with them had vanished. It had, in short, returned to the heights above, that is, the roof of the vault. They could just make out the outline of it between two rows of pillars.

"A wonderfully well-balanced thing that," said Morse, enthusiastically. "The maker of it, Martin, was a *mechanic*."

"He was—blow him!" growled Martin. "It seems to me, sir, that we have been shot down here, and the chances of getting up again are mighty small."

"I have no fears," said Morse. "The way in is not the way out of this place. I feel sure that we have come down a shoot, and this was a storehouse of a great city, once upon a time."

"It seems reasonable," said Jim, "but I won't be quite so sure as you are, Morse."

"Look here, Jim," said Morse, "I'll back my view for anything. See how the place is constructed. You enter the house and come to a passage that slopes downward and part of the way is firm. Why does it slope so? To enable men to singlehanded run heavy bales or boxes down. Then comes the shoot proper—a marvel of balancing—and up it tilts when anything gets beyond a certain mark. Even the weight of Chorker was enough."

"It were too much, I'm thinking," grumbled that sufferer, "or I shouldn't be here."

"Well," pursued Morse, "down come the goods to be stored, and men below receive them. What we have to do now is to find that storehouse."

"Not now," hinted Jim.

"Not this moment. For the present we will content ourselves in looking for a way out. It isn't far off, I am sure. I hope those fellows above will have the good-sense not to attempt to follow us."

"If they do they must stay here until we come back again."

"We are not out yet," said Rainstone, "and there isn't more than half a candle in the lantern."

Morse took the hint, and having taken his bearings by the light above, moved on, as he judged, in the direction of the square. The further they went, the taller became the huge pillars.

Morse stopped two or three times and reflected a bit, thereby exciting the half-hidden impatience of the rest. But he neither heeded it nor uttered a word.

As he had judged, there was a way out, and not so far away, although it was further than he expected.

They found it, above all things, in the form of a spiral staircase of stone. There was no railing to it, but the steps were broad, and had been laid upon each other in a way that seemingly disposed of the necessity of cement or any form of fastening.

It was not, as Dawson said, a staircase for little children to play about on.

"Nor exactly the place for a fight," remarked Morse, who was leading the way upward.

He counted the steps—two hundred in all. The flooring of the tremendous vault must, therefore, be at least a hundred and fifty feet below the level of the square.

At the top of the staircase there was no door, but merely a thin stone flag, which Morse pushed aside with one hand without assistance.

As he put his head out an exclamation of surprise burst from his lips.

"What's the matter?" inquired Jim, from the rear.

"Come up and see," answered Morse, as he stepped out.

And Jim uttered an exclamation, too, when he found where he was. So did they all, for the way out of the great vault was into the room or chamber of the Hall of Justice, which Jim and Morse had selected for their abiding-place. It was in a corner out of the way, and the position of the entrance to the vault not at all dangerous to those who walked there.

"May I be so bold as to ask where I am?" inquired Chorker.

"You are in a place that you must not intrude upon," replied Jim. "This is *my* room."

"I ain't likely to come here without leave, sir," said Chorker, humbly. "May I take the liberty of going away for a drink? I've got that 'ere fountain in my eye."

Jim said he could go, and he was shown the way out. The square was empty, save for the Missing Link, all the boys having gone on to the street below, where they were awaiting the return of their friends from the house.

Jim sent Dibble off to tell them that everybody had come home another way. With Dibble went his two chums of the morning, and Martin.

Jim returned to Morse, who had remained behind. He found him seated by the stone trap in a reverie. He did not even hear Jim's footsteps on the hard floor.

"Morse, what are your dreams? Thinking how you can blow up the vault?"

"No, Jim," was the answer; "I was meditating on what the past of this city might have been. But it is all guesswork, of course, except one thing, and that is, whoever lived in this hall was the entire boss of the show. All the stores of the city were kept below, and he dispensed them as he pleased."

"Surely not at all times?"

"Well, no. I was thinking of times of war and siege. It would then be necessary to keep a tight hand over the supplies."

"And what a job it must have been," said Jim, "to

dig out that place below—we haven't seen half of it, I fancy—and prop it up with those columns!"

"They didn't dig it out, Jim," replied Morse.

"Not dig it out? Was it hollowed for them?"

"It was not hollowed at all."

"Explain yourself, Morse. It is too early in the day to worry over conundrums."

"Those columns," said Morse, deliberately, "were built upon *level ground*. They were erected of various heights, sloping up to form an arched centre. Then the roof was put on, and the houses built upon *that*. Jim, the whole city rests upon an *artificial mound*. It is as hollow as a drum right through."

Jim rubbed his head, and walked towards the door.

"You make me feel warm, Morse," he said, "with these speculations. I'll have a little fresh air while Romeo is laying the breakfast."

Romeo had just entered for that purpose. Morse followed Jim into the outer hall.

"It is a wonderful piece of work," he said; "but see here, Jim, it was easier to do it that way. Fancy the labour that would be required to excavate under a city and put up these pillars!"

"I see," said Jim, "your reasoning is right. But, anyway, what a job! And all to have a good store-house."

"Under the control of a handful of its rulers," said Morse; "but I think the vault serves other purposes as well. That is for us to find out another time."

"Breakfast, Marse Jim!" cried Romeo from the doorway.

At the same moment Terry and Ganthony came bounding in from the front, and they all went in together. Martin and Giuseppe preferred living by themselves.

CHAPTER CCXXXVI.

THE THREE TALL MEN.—HOW MR. FARRELL KEPT FAITH.



ON the morning of the second day of the residence in the city named after Jim Gordon a steamer anchored off the island opposite the lagoon, close to the ruins of the old school.

A boat was lowered, and three tall men got into her, with five seamen—four to row and one to steer.

As they were about to push off, the captain of the steamer—it was a trader of the better class—looked over the side, and said:

"You will be sure to be on the spot when we return?"

"Certain," said one of the men.

"This day month?"

"Yes. We shall make our stay into a holiday of that length."

"Good-bye till then."

"Good-bye."

The seamen bent to their oars, and a taciturn old salt who sat at the helm steered up the lagoon.

"Where will you land?" he asked.

"Anywhere," they answered.

The boat was run aground opposite the old school, and the trio got out.

Each had a fair-sized travelling-bag with him, but not more than an average strong man could carry without acutely feeling the weight.

"Wot do you hope to find here?" growled the old salt, moved to speech by an overpowering curiosity.

"Many things," was the answer.

"Moskeeters, perhaps?"

"No, we do not anticipate meeting with ordinary mosquitoes," said the tallest of the three, "but when you come back again we may surprise you."

"I shall be surprised if you do," said the old salt.

"Give way, you lubbers, and get back. We've been hindered more'n enough as it is."

With no more by way of adieu, he steered his boat up the lagoon, and it vanished from sight.

"Politeness isn't his forte," was the comment of one of the three.

They walked up the beach, and suddenly the ruins of the school were seen. They had not been observed by them before.

"Hallo!" was the general exclamation, and then they looked at each other.

"This won't do."

"It isn't what we expected."

"Burnt out clean."

As these exclamations burst in succession from their lips they dropped their bags, and each brought out a big pocket-handkerchief, with which he wiped his face.

"Bit of a sell," muttered the one who was a shade taller than the others. "What's to be done?"

"We ought to hail the captain and get his opinion," replied another.

But the proposition, though voted a good one, could not be carried out.

The boat had vanished, and in a few moments more they saw the trader heading out to sea.

They waved their arms, and there was a fluttering of handkerchiefs from the deck of the vessel in response.

"Confound the fool!" roared the tallest man. "He thinks we are taking another leave of him. Stop! stop!"

He roared out the word in tones that were deafening, but he had not lungs that would carry his voice to the ship. It went on and on, and presently was lost sight of.

Then the three men sat down upon the sands, and reviled the ill-fortune that had brought them there.

"We haven't brought so much as a biscuit with us."

"Nor a drop of anything in a flask."

"We relied upon being received hospitably."

Thus they spoke, and then groaned in company.

"I suppose Farrell has moved the school," said the tallest man. "It ought to have occurred to us before. Naturally he has, having been burnt out."

"Perhaps they have all been burnt in their beds," was the suggestion of another.

"All could not have so perished," said the third. "Some have escaped."

They got up and walked to the ruins. The track made past them in the direction of the chine by those who had so often gone to and fro was very clear. They finally saw it.

"We shall find them higher up this way," said he who was always the foremost speaker, the tallest of the three.

So they went upon their quest in the direction of the chine.

Now it so happened that Mr. Farrell was abroad that morning, and he had observed the steamer from afar, but had not noticed the landing of the men.

Wondering why it should anchor for a short time and then depart, he came along the sands thinking, until he suddenly saw the three men approaching, and they saw him.

Up went their long arms in a cheery hail that scared him half out of his wits for the moment.

He would have turned and fled, but he had lost the power. Besides, it was some distance to the chine.

Furthermore, all three men could run, and they came along at a rattling pace.

"It's the three fathers expected by the boys!" he groaned.

Then he pulled himself together, and decided upon a course of action.

It was in every way worthy of him.

He was not going to recognise them, or admit his identity.

Drawing himself up, he awaited their coming, and when the foremost held out his hand he regarded him with surprise.

"Pardon me," he said, "but you are a stranger."

"Are you not Mr. Farrell?" asked the other.

"I am thankful to say I am not."

This reply astonished his hearers, who looked at each other with troubled faces.

They whispered together for a moment or two, and then another question was put to the self-repudiator.

"But you know him."

"I have seen him," admitted Mr. Farrell.

"He kept a school on the island?"

"He did, and does."

"Ah, now we are coming to it. He is still on the island?"

A bow was the response.

"Anywhere handy?"

"He is with his pupils, I believe, on the other side of yonder wood."

Again there were joyful exclamations, and Mr. Farrell breathed easy again. He saw that he was believed, and was prepared to lie to any length.

"You are a resident here?" said the tallest man.

"No," answered Mr. Farrell, "I am merely here on a short visit—fishing—ahem! It is my intention to leave to-night, when my boatman calls for me."

As he made this astounding statement the faces of the trio were once more wrapped in gloom.

"Then you are not in a position to—to give us anything to eat?" they inquired.

"I have not even a sandwich with me," said Mr. Farrell, truthfully enough, for a change.

"How is that?"

"My boatman foolishly took the luncheon-basket away with him. But you will excuse me. I must go and look to my lines. If you will be advised by me you will go at once in search of—ahem!—Mr. Farrell and his school."

"Is it very far?" asked the tallest man, doubtfully.

"I have never travelled through the wood myself," answered Mr. Farrell, "but it is, I should say it is, a goodish stretch."

"And the way to take?"

"You must return along the beach until you come to a marked-out path, up which you must go. At the top of it you will find an old castle, beyond that another path through the wood. It is, I believe, sufficiently clear for an ordinarily intelligent man not to lose his way."

Again the three men conferred in an undertone, Mr. Farrell watching them closely. Presently he caught the words, "There is really nothing else to be done," and smiled.

Their decision was to start without delay, and they asked him if there was anything to eat in a wild state upon the island.

Mr. Farrell said that the wood abounded in wild fruits in a green state, but hastened to add that fruit in any state on the island never disagreed with anyone.

"There is also," he added, "a species of periwinkle I believe about five miles up the beach, but as it is an out-of-the-way place, I do not recommend you to seek that sort of food. It is hardly edible in an uncooked state."

They thanked him dolorously, and with heads hanging rather low, started back again.

He watched them with a sardonic expression of face.

For once he had got the upper hand of somebody, and it tickled him to think what they would endure ere they reached the school on the other side of the island.

"And when they get there," he added, in his thoughts, "let them fight it out with their cubs. I am not supposed to know who they are."

Then he sauntered home, and the secret of that meeting he kept locked in his breast.

CHAPTER CCXXXVII.

GETTING STRAIGHT.—A TIME OF REPOSE.—DAWSON BRINGS ALARMING NEWS.



THE EXPLORATION of the vast vault under the city was a thing that would keep for a few days.

For a start there was so much to do in getting things in order, and it was also deemed advisable to husband their provisions by going about the country and into the wood to see what was worth shooting. A fishing party, under the charge of Changeling, was also organised and despatched to the sea, near where the wreck of the "Cagliula" lay. It was not a long journey, and they could return to sleep in the city at night.

On the eve of the day they set out, they came back with a lot of delicious flat-fish, small soles and plaice, and with the news that the wintry storms and heavy seas had completely broken up that vessel.

Dawson, Terry, Ganthony, and half-a-dozen more went shooting, with instructions to keep a sharp lookout for strangers, and on seeing them to run for the city and give the alarm.

"And I daresay," said Jim, "that if you can do so without being seen, we can arrange a surprise for them."

Dawson promised to be on the alert, and the first day's sport was productive of a pig that weighed twelve stone, and two hares, of a different species from the English breed, but much the same in eating.

The next day they had the good fortune to come across a flock of pigeons, all feeding on a small space of ground on something that grew there they particularly fancied.

As nearly all the sportsmen had the good fortune to be able to let fly into the thick of them, seventy-odd birds was the result, and there was pigeon for all for supper—a most welcome change of meat.

Romeo and his progenitors meanwhile had fitted up a room in an empty house for the fowls to roost and to remain in for the present, as Jim desired. He had his reason for keeping them out of sight.

Sleery and Trueberry, assisted by Johnny Daw and his two men, went to work on the borders of the wood making rough furniture, and altogether it was a busy time.

As for Morse and Jim, they did little else but go about helping all with their advice. Both had need of a rest, and wisely they took it. Chorker was assistant to the niggers, and he had a grand time in helping them to put up fowl perches, being equally well qualified for the job.

The Missing Link held aloof from everybody, and was rarely seen in the daytime. As nobody wanted him, it didn't matter.

Things went on thus for four days, and the fifth arrived. They had two or three heavy showers and a short thunderstorm, but otherwise the weather was perfect.

On the fifth day the fishing party did not go from Gordontown, but remained behind to assist in other matters. Dawson and Terry went out shooting without their companions.

Noon was approaching when Johnny Daw, who was lounging about the outside of the city, saw the two sportsmen come tearing down the hill. He knew there was something wrong, and sent Dibble, who was close by, on to warn Jim Gordon. In five minutes there was word passed for the whole of the party to assemble in the Hall of Justice, and so smart was the warning given that two-thirds of them were under shelter before Terry or Dawson had reached the square.

Jim and Morse were prepared to receive them. They guessed what their tidings would be, and were not mistaken.

"They are coming!" gasped Terry, as he bounded into the hall.

"Who?" asked Jim, as a matter of form.

"Our governors," answered Terry—"mine, Ganthony's, and Trimmer's."

"Did they see you?"

"No, nor did I see them; but Dawson did. Here he is."

Dawson was more pumped than Terry. He was not quite so lightly built, and not in such good training. He had to take a short rest before he could speak.

"Well," said Jim, "what have you seen?"

"Three men, six-footers," answered Dawson,

"coming through the wood. They look as if they hadn't eaten anything for a month, and can hardly crawl. As I spotted them, they were obliged to squat down and rest. I heard them groan and vow they would settle with somebody when they got hold of them."

Terry, Ganthony, and Trimmer looked apprehensive, and just a trifle pale. But they remembered other martyrs, and pulled themselves together.

"They can only lick us," said Terry; "there is nothing for you other fellows to fear."

"They will find nobody to lick when they arrive," replied Jim. "Now, boys, Morse and I conceived a scheme that will puzzle them. All we have to do is for the lot of us to hide in the vault for the day."

A murmur of astonishment burst from the boys. It was also one of approval, especially from Terry, Trimmer, and Ganthony.

"All is prepared," continued Jim. "The lights are ready, so is the grub for the day. Hurry along, all of you, to our room. Mind how you go down, and be as steady and quiet as you can. I will remain here until the last."

He had his binoculars ready, and obediently the rest melted into the inner chamber. The three niggers each carried a big basket of provisions, and there was a feeling of going on a novel kind of spree in the breasts of everybody, save those who had the doubtful joy of a possible meeting with wrathful fathers to poison their reflections.

Jim was left alone. He believed that all had gone to the vault until he suddenly remembered the Missing Link. Chorker was all right, but his companion had not been seen since breakfast-time.

"But he doesn't matter," thought Jim; "they won't be able to get anything out of the beggar, even if he allows them to get near him."

He could command the line of wood from where he stood, and he kept the binoculars moving to the right and left until a full half-hour had elapsed.

Then he saw the trio.

All tall, and so gaunt that a moderately well-fed skeleton-man would have been stout in comparison.

Jim understood what was the matter. They had journeyed through the wood without proper food, and at that time of the year there was precious little to satisfy hunger. They were starved to veritable skin and bone. They could scarcely crawl, and they held on to each other for support. They slowly crawled along.

Jim dashed into the kitchen, where, as he expected, he found a lot of broken food. He put it together on a wooden tray, and laid it on the outer steps of the great hall.

The starving men would assuredly crawl up thither,

it would be natural for them to do so. And they were coming on straight to the city.

Having done this much, he went upon the track of his friends, and found Morse awaiting him by the entrance to the vaults.

"All safely down," he said, "except Chorker, who slipped down the last ten steps and barked his shins."

They pushed the stone covering half over the entrance, and then slipped down. Underneath there were handles to draw it into its place. That done, they descended to the vault, where an expectant group, with faces lit up by another lantern, was awaiting them.

Somehow, those who had not had a peep at the vault before were beginning to think that it would not be quite so funny to stop down there as they expected.

"Dawson is short-sighted," said Terry; "perhaps he was mistaken."

"Was I?" exclaimed Dawson, derisively.

Then Jim settled the matter as he reached the group.

"It is all right, boys," he said. "They are here; I've seen them."

"There is one comfort for you, Terry," said Dawson, "your dad is so weak that he could not brush a fly off you."

"He'll try, anyway," groaned Terry.

CHAPTER CCXXXVIII.

THREE MEN IN A FIX.—THEY MEET THE MISSING LINK.



NOT the least doubt that they were starving would have been entertained by anyone who saw the three men emerge from the wood. Fairly stout when they landed on the island, they were now reduced to skeletons almost—mere shadows of their former

selves. Their eyes were hollow, their skin loose upon their faces, their mouths dry, and lips hard.

With their gaze stolidly fixed on the ground, they crawled on, silent and grim, as dumb outcasts would have done. The utter misery of these three men cannot be described. For many hours they had not spoken, but kept on and on, mechanically clinging to their small bags containing their luggage.

They did not even see the city ahead of them until they were more than half-way down the slope, and then he who was tallest raised his eyes and uttered an

exclamation. It roused the others, and they looked up too. But they were not glad.

"It is a mirage," said one.

"It is nothing," groaned the other.

But the tallest of them—and he was the strongest also—declared it was no mirage.

"It is a city," he said, "and here we shall find the boys."

"And get something to eat," moaned the others in concert.

"To be sure," was the rejoinder.

The bare prospect of food gave them a portion of the energy they had lost back again, and with eyes filled with wonder they passed through the nearest gateway.

Immediately in front of them they beheld a tent, and by its entrance squatted a hideous old man. It was the Missing Link, and the tent was that which Morse had left behind him long before, when the first visit was paid to the Dead City, as they called it then.

The Missing Link had found it, and as he came of a tent-living people, he knew how to pitch it, and was rejoiced to find himself, in a measure, home again. In a tent, a peace that no house could give was upon him.

He stared at the three strangers, but he was not dismayed. All who dwell in the desert know the signs of starvation from bitter experience. So the Missing Link sprang up, and cried out in his native tongue:

"Who is it that comes hungering here?"

And strange to say the tallest of the men understood him, for he answered:

"We are three men who have been starving in the wood, eating the very bark of trees to stave off hunger. We seek a number of boys and a school. Are they here?"

"They are," replied the Missing Link, "and I, Oka Wallah, chief of the Ouram Dervishes, am but as a dog among them."

"Lead us to them that we may have food," said the other.

Oka Wallah, no longer the Missing Link to us, whatever he may be to the boys, rose up, and bowing thrice, led the way into the city.

It was a toilsome climb up to the square, but with the knowledge that their journey had come to an end, and with a vision of food before them, the miserable trio succeeded in getting there.

Oka Wallah looked about him amazed.

"Behold!" he said, "they have all vanished. As the mist of the morning they have been wafted away."

The three men groaned.

"It is another form of the mirage," muttered one.

Oka Wallah gave them another drop of comfort.

"It may be, oh, starving strangers!" he said, "that

these boys, who are as devils in the desert in their antics, are with their young chief in the temple yonder."

"Let us go and see if they are," groaned the tallest man; "if they are not, I for one must turn up the whole thing."

They crawled after the chief of the Dervishes of Ouram, and soon came the finding of the tray of food.

Oka Wallah was about to help himself, when he was tumbled on one side, and he rolled down the steps to the level below.

"The seven plagues seize you!" he cried, as he sat up and stared at the trio lying down by the tray and disposing of the food in a fashion that threatened to afterwards painfully incommode them.

He hesitated awhile, knowing that starving men of their height were not to be trifled with, and when he did at last go up to them, the tray was empty and they were picking up the crumbs. But they were doing that for amusement. They were replete.

Oka Wallah looked at the tray, but whatever he felt he said nothing. The instincts of desert hospitality, which offers all to a guest, even if it is not meant, forbade the utterance of a word.

He was asked to seek the boys, and entered the temple. But he was soon back again with the information that they were not there.

"It matters not," murmured the tallest of the men, as he curled himself up in the doorway; "we have not slept well of late. The sun warms us. After a little sleep we will seek the boys. You needn't wait, Oka Wallah."

No doubt they were all weary, and the hearty meal they had eaten had its own somnolent effect. Sleep they wanted, and ere Oka Wallah had descended half-way to the fountain they were all snoring loudly.

CHAPTER CCXXXIX.

THE BIG BRONZE DOORS.—A STARTLING DISCOVERY.



IT was the hope of Jim and Morse, and it may be said the hope of Terry, Ganthony, and Trimmer, also, that the three men would, on finding the city deserted, be content with eating the food they found, and then pursue their journey to the coast, or, better still, return by the way they came, giving up hope of finding the school there.

The vast underground vault was hardly a place to stay in, and in that case they would not sleep there.

They had lights for about ten hours, and at the expiration of that time they intended to go back again and know the worst.

Meanwhile, although going far away from the spiral stairway was forbidden, Morse could not be idle. With Martin and Changeling he proposed to make a circuit round with the object of finding the limits of the vault, and possibly coming across the storehouse he felt sure was there.

But the limit of the place was not discovered that day, though by the echoes Morse was sure it was not extended beyond the city.

With his two companions he began his search without any fear of losing the rest, for they were talking freely and had their lights burning.

There was something impressive, overpowering, in the vastness of this underground work. The enormous size of the stone pillars alone ranked them among the wonders of the world.

Presently the way was blocked by a wall that was inclined to the circular form, and following it up, the discovery was made that there was in the apparent centre of that underground place a vast circular chamber, entrance to which could only be gained by opening two massive bronze gates.

They were of splendid workmanship, and the moulding of the panels was marvellous. There was neither handle nor visible lock to them, but they were firmly closed, and all the efforts of Changeling and Martin to stir them were fruitless. Still it was evident that they did open, for the hinges were visible.

"This is the storehouse," said Morse, "and we have to get in here somehow."

"The gates," replied Martin, "if they are only two inches thick—and they are more than that, I'll warrant—must weigh many tons."

Then a bright thought struck him.

"Perhaps, like the gates of the tower," he said, "they are not made to open, and the entrance is somewhere else."

"No," said Morse, "they open somehow. But we will have a look at them another day."

They returned to their friends, and Morse sat down upon the lowest step of the stairway to think. He called to mind all he had ever read about secret fastenings, and invisible locks, and other matters that might help him to solve the mystery of the bronze gates.

He was in no way disturbed by the boys, who, for the lack of something better to do, played leapfrog and hide-and-seek, and disported themselves as they used to do at school, while Jim talked to Martin and the other men, who were smoking.

But there were three persons at least who were in

a terror-stricken state all the time. These were Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo.

The two former wondered if they had come at last upon a real haunt of ghosts, and whether Romeo would be able to keep them at a distance.

As for Romeo, he was in mortal fear that out of the deep darkness around something would come especially bent on punishing him for his having dared to arrogate to himself a ghost-laying power.

They all kept as close to Jim as they could, having more faith in him than any other living person there and when dinner-time arrived they made themselves a centre of a circle of hungry people, and from that secure position unpacked the baskets and dispensed the food and drink.

But there were no ghosts about, and no alarm from above.

At last, in the afternoon, Jim and Johnny Daw and Terry went up to listen at the stone trap above to find out if anyone was moving in the Hall of Justice.

"If they are going at all," said Jim, "they are gone by this time."

Cautiously they opened the trap an inch or two. A sound like that of sawing wood came from the distance. It was very faint.

The trap was opened further, and Jim put his head out. There was nobody in his chamber, and the sound undoubtedly came from the distant hall. He opened the trap yet further and stepped out.

"Wait here," he said. "I shall not belong."

Softly he trod along the stone flooring to the outer hall, and there he saw the three men lying side by side upon their backs. Each and all were snoring as if in competition for a handsome prize. It was a perturbing sight, but he went back laughing, and told Terry what he had seen.

"I should like to see dad," said Terry.

"There is no fear of waking him," said Jim.

Terry went on alone, but he was soon back again with a joyful expression on his face.

"My dad isn't among them," he said.

"Are you sure?" said Jim.

"Certain. I should know him, I fancy."

"You ought to," said Johnny Daw.

"Go down and bring Ganthony and Trimmer up here," said Jim, after a moment's thinking. "Be as quick as you can."

"I can call them up," suggested Daw.

"Do so," assented Jim.

They were still enough below, as all were awaiting intelligence from those above. Ganthony and Trimmer speedily responded to the call.

"Your fathers are outside by the entrance, asleep," said Jim. "Go and look at them."

They went, and came back, as Terry had done, with the knowledge that their fathers had not arrived.

"Do you know them at all?" asked Jim.

They did not.

"Fetch up everybody," said Jim. "It strikes me that we have been making donkeys of ourselves by hiding away."

A general summons was given, with the warning not to make more noise than was necessary and unavoidable, and the vault was soon empty.

Then the boys were told to go in turn and look at the sleepers, and the result was that not one of them could recognise the strangers.

"Now there is a nut for somebody to crack," said Jim; "who are they?"

"Whoever they are," said Morse, "they have no authority over us, and if we can't stand up against three men, and defy them, if need be, we ought to be kicked off the island."

"And they haven't any right here," said Terry.

"Having eaten our grub," said Dawson, "we ought to send in a bill."

"Anyway, they don't stop here."

"Let us wake them up and tell them so."

"If we all yelled together it would make them jump!"

There was quite a babel of suggestions, but Jim finally checked them.

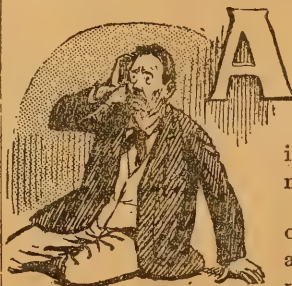
"We have been hiding away, apparently for nothing," he said, "but it is impossible to say whose emissaries these men may be. I think you had better all remain quiet while I go with Morse and wake them up. We can settle who and what they are in five minutes."

"Always sensible," said Martin; "cool and practical as a man!"

Morse assented, as he would have done had Jim asked him to assist in endeavouring to hustle the strangers out of the city, and they went out of the chamber together.

CHAPTER CCXL.

THE IDENTITY OF THE STRANGERS.—GOOD NEWS FOR MORSE.—OKA WALLAH GOES OFF IN A HUFF.



TOUCH of the hand upon the shoulder sufficed for the tallest of the trio to turn over and mutter:

"All right; I'll get up in a minute. Do leave me in peace!"

Jim shook him, and he opened his eyes. He stared at Jim, then at the portico of the Hall of

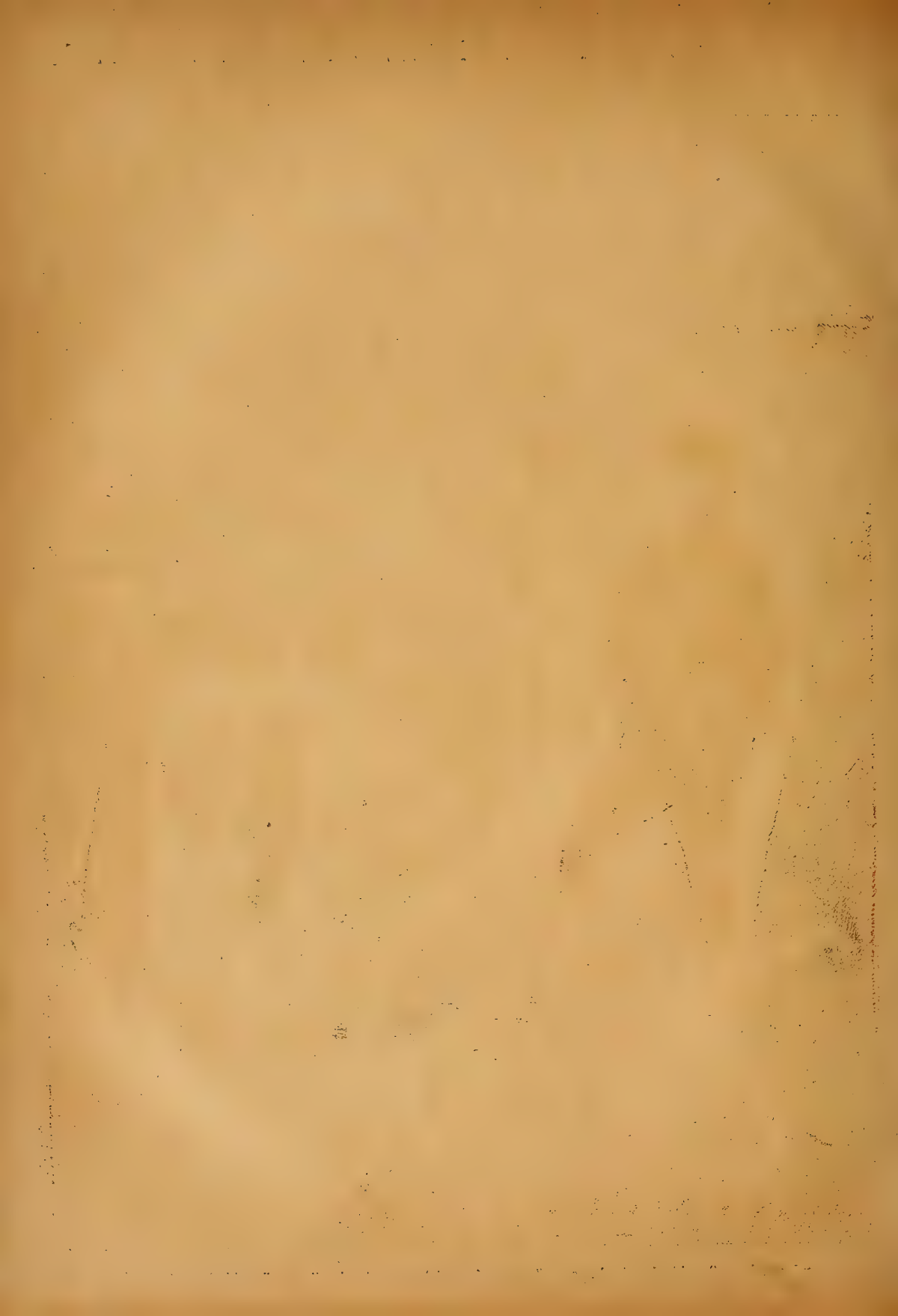
Justice, and then at his surroundings generally. Finally he sat up.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.
By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.

The Island School.



"I am here," said the flagbearer, "to confer with your leader." "I," said Jim, "am the leader here."



"Excuse me a moment," he said; "my head will soon be clearer. I was dreaming of being at home. You are two of Farrell's boys, I presume?"

"We are, in a sense," answered Jim, "although he is not with us now."

"Not with you!" exclaimed the stranger; "I hope nothing has happened to him."

"Is he an old friend of yours?"

"No, but I have a letter of introduction to him from Haze's people. I was assured by them that we should be able to get accommodation at Farrell's school during our short stay. We meant to pay for it, of course."

"I shall be glad," said Jim, "if you will explain who you are, and how you came here."

"My name is Juniper," was the reply—"Professor Juniper, of the Polytechnic, London. These are my friends. The one on the right is Mr. Bunkerstraw, the great botanist, of whom you may have heard."

"I can't say I have," replied Jim, candidly, "but my age and inexperience will account for that."

"My friend on the left," said Juniper, "is Mr. Chunkstone, a leading light in geology. We came here for a month's holiday, which we intended to pass in agreeable studies of the island."

Jim asked him how he came to select that island, and the professor told him that it was a mere accident. They wanted some place, comparatively unknown and not tourist-haunted, and they fixed upon the island.

"And how long do you stay?"

"A month."

Jim was inclined to make a wry face, but he restrained himself. No good would come of making enemies of these strangers.

"I am afraid," said Jim, "that you will find little to assist you on this side of the island."

"We can look about us, you know," said the professor, cheerfully.

Then he woke up his two friends, and as soon as they could understand things, an introduction was effected.

"As regards living," said Juniper, "we can share the tent of Oka Wallah. I am able to speak his tongue."

"And who is Oka Wallah?" demanded Jim.

They told him, and Morse remembered leaving the tent behind them. The professor said that Oka Wallah was a great man in his own country, and Jim said he was glad to hear it, but he should be glad if he would get back as soon as he could.

"If I told him that," said Juniper, "he would be offended and take himself off."

"Then tell him," said Jim.

"Let me warn you," said the professor, "that, monkeyish as he appears to be, he is a man of power

in his own country. He could raise a host of his people and bring them over here on what *they* would call a holy war for the extermination of the infidel."

But Jim only laughed.

"You give him my message," he said, "and tell him to begone. He came here without leave, and he need not trouble himself to bid us adieu."

"Well, as you please," said the professor. "So you have settled to have the school here?"

"The boys are all in another part of the building. Morse, you might tell them we have visitors."

Jim gave his friend a meaning look, which was intended for a warning to be given to the boys not to talk too much about their own affairs. Morse understood it.

It was conveyed to them, and they all walked in as demure as mice, marching like good boys on ordinary school parade—two and two. And none of the three learned men saw anything novel in it.

They patronised the youngsters in their style of addressing them, as all great and learned men will do, and then, on Jim suggesting it, went away to the kitchen for a wash.

They wanted it badly.

The general wish was that their visitors should make as short a stay as possible, and go away with the impression that the school was going on all right. Talking when they got home might lead to an investigation that would terminate the island life.

The difficulty lay in accounting, as they would have to do, for the absence of Mr. Farrell.

"But I daresay we shall get out of the bother of their coming somehow."

Weary with their march through the wood, the three scientific men expressed their determination to take a day or two of rest. Nothing but assenting to it could be done, but Jim gave quiet orders for nothing to be said about the vast vaults below, or, indeed, on other matters appertaining to their island life.

But Morse, when talking to Chunkstone in the evening, ventured to show him a small piece of the stone he had brought from the cavern under the castle, and asked him if he knew what it was.

The geologist examined it carefully, his eyes gradually lighting up as the miner's do as he unearths nugget after nugget from the soil.

"Where did you get this from?" he asked.

"I found it on the island," replied Morse.

"It is jasper of the rarest quality," said Chunkstone; "so rare indeed that it was highly prized and considered of great value among the Romans of old. Where they got it from is unknown, for none so pure or of such rich colouring as this has been discovered for centuries—practically from their time till now."

"I thought it very pretty," replied Morse. "What is this fragment worth?"

It was about the size of a broad bean. Chunkstone turned it over and over before replying, as if reckoning up its value. He was, in fact, comparing it with other stones he had seen in Rome, of which he had heard the price.

"In its present state," he said, "it would fetch about sixty pounds."

He handed it back to Morse, whose face flushed as he thought of the store he had left behind him in the laboratory in the castle tower.

If all were of the same quality he was the possessor of vast riches. He asked a question as to colour. Had it anything to do with the value?

"Jaspers of this class," answered Chunkstone, "are of many shades. It is entirely a question of purity of colouring where the value comes in."

He did not ask Morse where he had discovered his valuable prize, for he knew that he would not point out the spot to a stranger. But he handed back the jasper stone with a reluctant sigh.

And in his heart he decided to have a hunt round on his own account. With his knowledge of geology he would know where there was a chance of a find, and where it would be useless to look for anything of value.

About the same time Professor Juniper was interviewing Oka Wallah, and enlightening him as to the views the boys had of his presence there.

It would have astonished Jim if he could have seen the change that came over the old man as he received the intimation that he was not wanted. He changed in a moment from a fairly pacific and rather comical old man to a fiend.

In the glowing language of the desert he informed the professor that he thought he had been an honoured guest, and favoured with a special residence down by the castle on account of his dignified position as a chief. Chorker he looked upon as another chief, especially as he had had food brought him, and lived, in a sense, at his ease.

"And I have been eating the bread of a beggar," he said, with his beard bristling. "Enough. I will go. There are boats on the other side of the island. Some have sails. I will trust myself to the sea, and if I reach my country, I will gather some of my people together and return!"

Then he marched out of Gordontown and made his way into the wood.

It was not until the professor reported the last words uttered by Oka Wallah that their significance became apparent.

"I always thought," said Jim, talking the matter over with Morse, "that the old wretch was half-monkey, half-devil. I shall not forget the way he pitched into Chorker after eating all the roast pork. I only hope that we shall hear no more of him."

"Arabs and Moorish fellows," said Morse, "would give us more trouble than the Minorca band did. I think, as a matter of precaution, we ought to establish a lookout on the other side. Somebody ought to be at the castle. It ought to be myself, as I have a lot to do there."

"But you cannot live there alone."

"I should prefer company, of course. Indeed, I think it right that I should have someone to run over here in case of need. Say that I have Romeo and two or three of the boys?"

"But if we are no longer in danger of a visit from the three fathers——"

"We are not free of that, Jim. Besides, it will be better to split us up in the way I propose. We ought to be prepared for every emergency. And, after all, it will add to the fun and excitement of our life here."

"As you please," replied Jim; "but I must confess that when you are away I feel a bit lost. You are such a fellow to meet anything that turns up unexpectedly."

"We are getting short of powder," said Morse, quietly, "and we have none here to speak of. Nor have we all the materials to make it."

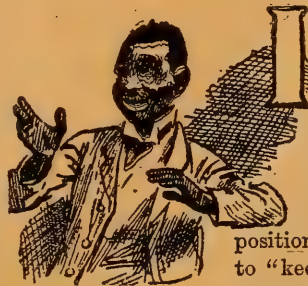
"Well, you must go," said Jim; "but there is no hurry."

"I go in the morning," returned Morse, with decision. "And mind one thing—keep the secret of the vault close. I expect one day to make a great discovery in the store-room."

Jim promised, and they talked of other things in their usual vein, but both felt there were troublous times again impending. On the island there was seemingly to be no long spell of rest.

CHAPTER CCXLI.

MORSE RETURNS TO THE CASTLE.



It was decided that Morse was to take with him, in addition to Romeo, Terry, Lal Brodie, and Johnny Daw. The latter was selected as he was of a wandering disposition, and proposed himself to "keep going," as he termed it, by travelling pretty regularly to and fro, so as to keep each side posted up with the movements of the other, supposing nothing else turned up to communicate.

Lal Brodie was chosen, as he could manage a boat

and could, when not required for more important things, do a bit of fishing. Jim asked Terry to give the Farrells a look, just to see how they were going on.

With the original arrangements thus disturbed, it was only natural that the parting in the morning should be a quiet one. It was not an occasion for cheering or lively adieus, and the party of six, with one sledge containing their belongings, set out at an early hour. Half the boys were not up when they were some miles on the road in the forest.

Morse was thoughtful, but after the first hour his companions were lively enough.

It was the nature of them all, and Jim had especially chosen them for that gift of disposition, so that they might make Morse's semi-lonely life as bright as possible.

They found the woods alive with birds, many specimens of which they had never seen before, and the number of young pigs, offsprings of the early year, that crossed their path was amazing.

"Pears to me," said Romeo, "dat dere been a lot ob dem creaturs deported dis way since we larst here."

They shot a young pig and roasted it for dinner. It was the most succulent porker they had tasted—"As tender as chicken!" declared Terry—and later on they shot a hare, but it was in poor condition, and only Romeo partook of it. At the outside there was enough for two, and Romeo picked every bone of it for his supper.

They lost no time in getting over the ground, and in the afternoon of the following day came to the Long House, which was just as they left it. No intruder had been there.

Morse had settled to live there, as they had done before, and he bade Romeo go in and put the rooms as much in order as he could. They had brought their sleeping-rugs with them, and the nigger went on with the sledge, while Morse and his companions stayed outside near the concealed subway.

"I shall make a mere hole by the wall," said Morse, "and creep in and out that way. We can stick a bush into it, and hide it from anyone who may happen to come along. As a rule, I shall work at night in the castle, and alone."

They knew him too well to demur, although they wondered how he could do it. With all their pluck, not one of the four would have stayed a night there without a companion.

Romeo entered the Long House, and a few moments later he came bounding out with his eyes starting from his head.

But it was with joy, not with terror.

"Gollymashers all roun'!" he cried. "He come back!"

"What do you mean?" was the question put to the somewhat startled Morse.

"He in de old place," cried Romeo, capering about, "jes' as perky as eber."

"If you don't say who it is," roared Terry, "I'll knock you down. Is it Mr. Farrell?"

"You tink me caper 'bout for *him*?" said Romeo, in infinite disdain. "What you take me for? You tink me a soft, pappy-headed fool?"

"Will you tell me who it is?" cried Terry, picking up a big stone.

"Why, who should it be *but de calf*?" screamed Romeo, as he turned about deliriously. "He as perky as eber, me tell you! And what more, *he got a grin on him face!*"

"The calf!"

"He tinkin ob de way he dance dat ole fool, my gran'fader 'bout," said Romeo. "Dat calf a jockler sort ob animal. He take fust prize at de show for dat."

Considerably relieved, they all went in to look at the wonderful prize animal, and there it was, sure enough, not specially perky to an ordinary observer, but in fairly good condition, and seemingly quite happy.

To their eyes it had grown considerably since they saw it last, and Terry meditatively said it would make splendid veal.

"Better let the beggar grow into beef," said Johnny Daw. "It takes a brute to bleed a calf to death to make veal of him."

Leaving Romeo to his housework, which he performed in snatches, with rushes in between to the calf to hug the complacent creature, they went back to the subway, taking an old pick with them.

Morse selected the spot for an entrance, and it was soon made. They all crept through, and once more stood within the castle walls. It was sombre enough in there, and had the look of being deserted more strongly than ever. It seemed, too, as if new echoes were created by their footsteps, and on their entering the banquet-hall they stopped to look around.

The floor was strewn with the rubbish left behind when they hurriedly removed the fowls. The perches had all fallen down, and Felton declared that they had been left up.

"I helped Romeo to catch the fowls, and they were off their perches. We did not touch them. I distinctly remember leaving them in their places."

"That is nothing," said Terry. "It was nigger's work, and not expected, of course, to stand."

"I say," cried Johnny Daw, "I never noticed before that this floor was not exactly level."

None of them had. But they noticed it now. There was a slope in it, not of very much account, apparently, but it was there.

"The flooring *was* level," remarked Terry. "What do you say, Morse?"

"I think with you," was the careless reply; "but we did not bother to look closely. Come along."

They crossed the courtyard, and after a look at the blocked gateway, ascended to the battlements.

A look round from there showed they had nothing in view to give rise to apprehension. The sea was absolutely clear of all classes of vessels, and the land below showed no signs of life.

Leaving his friends there, Morse absented himself to get a peep at his laboratory. He was gone about a quarter of an hour, and when he came back he looked paler than usual. But his companions were not close observers; and did not perceive it. He told them that he would want some charcoal made as soon as possible, and they must select a spot for the burning where the smoke was not visible from the sea.

"Just behind the castle walls?" suggested Terry.

"No," said Morse; "go right into the wood. The smoke will filter through the trees and scatter. Get to work at once, boys."

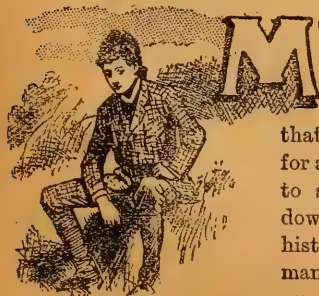
He seemed in a hurry, and that did cause them surprise. He was invariably hitherto so deliberate in his movements. But as he led the way out they soon forgot their surprise, and with saws and axes they went up to the wood to make the best of the time between then and the tea-hour.

Morse sat down by the Long House, and looked long and steadily at the castle. Presently a soliloquy of deep import came slowly from his lips.

"The floor of the hall slopes, so does the flooring of the chambers in the tower; there are minor cracks in the walls. Something has happened below, and the castle is slowly subsiding. Query, then: *How long will it stand before the crash comes?*"

CHAPTER CXXII.

MORSE KEEPS THE SECRET OF THE IMPENDING DISASTER.—WORK FOR THE NERVES.



MORSE sat long alone thinking. He called to mind all he had read about buildings, that, after standing erect for ages, showed a tendency to sink, and finally come down with a run. The history of the world has many such records, and the conclusion he came to was

that the castle was *doomed*.

But, as he asked himself, how long would it stand?

He had so much work to do in his laboratory, work that he could do nowhere else on the island, that he was unwilling to abandon it. But there was no inducement beyond that to linger in a falling building.

From his companions he determined to keep the secret of the danger. They at least would have work in the wood, and he could on the old lines ask them not to enter the castle, as he wished to be there alone. That would be nothing new.

Again—when did the subsidence begin? Was it an affair of days or weeks? If so, there was yet some time ahead before the fall. But if it had taken place that morning, it was possible that the catastrophe was but a matter of hours.

He charged it to something wrong in those vast caverns below. Perhaps a subsidence that had taken place, weakening the foundations of the mighty structure. He thought it would be as well to go down and see; but he shrank from doing it alone.

It would have required more than mortal courage to make the venture. With Jim by his side, he would have gone, perhaps, but his present companions were not exactly of the right metal for such a task.

By-and-by the others returned. They were laughing merrily at some jest of Johnny Daw's, and he was relieved to find that they did not mention the castle. They had, in short, forgotten all about the discovery of the hall-floor being uneven.

Romeo had tea ready, and having partaken of it, they came outside, and sat there until the sun went down. Then Morse said he was going to work for a few hours, but promised not to extend his labours past midnight.

"Unfortunately," he said, with a forced smile, "it is of a nature that daylight does not suit, or I would have attended to it while you were away."

They thought his manner odd, and talked of it after he was gone, but ended by supposing that he had not got over the fatigue of his recent journey. Indeed, they all felt it, and retired early.

Morse, in his laboratory, brought out his collection of jasper stone and spread it on the table. Then, by the light of a bright lamp, he compared it with the piece he had shown to Chunkstone, the geologist. In brilliancy and colour the whole stock was equal to, and in many cases surpassed, it.

If he could dispose of it at its market value, he would be the possessor of immense wealth.

Morse did not desire riches for riches' sake, but he longed for wealth to enable him by-and-by, when he returned to the old country, to purchase for himself the instruments and appliances of those who indulge in scientific research.

But what was he to do with this valuable material while he was on the island? If the castle were really

about to fall, it would be a sorry ending to his daring adventure if all he gained was buried under the ruins.

It would take a vast amount of labour, more than he could command, to dig it out. And could he trust those engaged in such a labour? He would have to say why he wanted the ruins examined, and all sorts of troublesome questions would be the outcome of that. The Spanish Government might, with some show of reason, claim it. He had really no real right to it, as the world takes such things.

But Morse felt it was his own, and he did not mean to part with it. While he thought over these matters, he became aware of a slight shifting movement under his feet. It was very slight, but perceptible. Some of the bottles on the shelves, being close together, rattled, and Morse took one hurried glance towards the means of exit.

But the tremulous movement almost instantly ceased, and he returned to his speculations on what would be the outcome of his big find.

He decided to pack the jasper stones in an old bag, which he sometimes used for transporting material to and from his laboratory, and this was soon done. Then he had to decide on what was to be done with all his other treasures there.

The collection left by the previous occupant of the long, long ago was an extensive one. It was also very valuable, especially to the student.

Then a portion of it that was his own would require very careful removal. At least a dozen journeys to and fro would have to be performed ere he could clear the place. Meanwhile—

And then came another interruption to his thoughts. The trembling of the tower was resumed. It made him sick at heart, for there is no sensation so horrible as that felt by persons when they first experience the ground-heaving which attends an earthquake. And this motion was exactly like it.

He felt sure that the castle was coming down.

The flooring was out of the level now. He could not only feel it, but see it. Oh! it was horrible!

He got upon his feet and essayed to put away his treasure, but his trembling hands refused to perform their office. He dropped the bag, and walked in a weak fashion towards the ladder that led to the chamber below.

Then it appeared to him that the tower leant on one side, and, with strained ears, he listened for the breaking of the walls.

A splitting of rock or stone came from the outside. It was like the sharp snapping of rifles in a cold atmosphere.

The perspiration poured from his face, and dropping upon his hands and knees, he backed to the ladder and put his feet through the opening.

Then he could see some of the pieces of jasper rolling from the table, an indication of the tower being much out of the perpendicular. To him it appeared as if the flooring sank downwards before him like a sloping bank.

"The tower is going!" he gasped, and he endeavoured to get down below with all speed.

But his feet slipped, and he hung for a moment by his hands alone.

But not for long.

There was a rocking of the massive building that caused his legs to swing, somewhat like a pendulum, to and fro. A cry for help burst from his lips, but there were none close by to hear it. His hands loosened their hold, and he fell to the floor below. Then he remembered no more.

CHAPTER CCXLIII.

ROMEO HAS A SHOCK.—A WONDROUS SIGHT.



TIRED of the work of the day, the companions of Morse went to bed and sank into a sound sleep. They were destined not to hear anything that would alarm them until aroused by Romeo.

The negro also slept for a time, but having partaken of a supper that would have taxed the digestion of any living thing, he was troubled with dreams of the most hideous nature.

He dreamt that his head was of enormous size, so big, indeed, that he could not walk about without feeling the sensation of one with an enormous weight upon his shoulders. He felt that he was ever to be a light porter, doomed to carry a monster burden with him wherever he went.

This conviction having got hold of him in his sleep, he began to bewail it in groans that were realities; but ere he had let out many from his tortured bosom he was pulled up short by falling out of bed.

It was not the first time he had done so, for he was oft a restless sleeper, much given to turning and twisting about, and he would have thought little of it, but for a curious splitting sound that came from the outside.

"What dat?" he muttered.

He did not attribute it to supernatural origin, and having obtained a light, he stole softly to the boys' dormitory.

Brodie, Daw, Felton, and Terry were there, all still as dreamless sleepers are, but Morse's bed was empty.

"He not back from dat blessed castle. What de time?"

He went to the front door, and opening it, looked out at the stars. He could tell by the position of the Great Bear that it was not yet midnight.

A late moon was in the sky, and he walked down to the front of the castle to see if there was a light burning in the tower. But the moment he turned the corner he cast one glance upward, and then bounded back to the Long House.

Frantic with the new-born terror, he burst into the dormitory, as it may be termed, and, with a yell, awoke every sleeper.

"Who's there?"

"What the deuce is that shindy about?"

"What's the matter?"

"Give me my revolver. I'll soon see!"

These exclamations and utterances burst from the awakened ones in rapid succession. They could not see Romeo. He hurriedly made his presence known.

"Don't shoot me, Marse Terry!" he gasped; "but get up and come down to de castle. Suffin' riotifully had happen dere, for sure."

"Well, what is it? Has anything happened to the calf?" asked Terry, angrily.

"Marse Terry, you make no joke ob it when you know. Marse Morse done for!"

They were all awake and on the alert now. There was a sound of tumbling out of bed and hurrying on of clothes, as they in concert asked him what he meant.

"De tower down!" groaned Romeo.

"Oh, you've been dreaming," said Terry. "Do you think that we should not have heard it?"

"Me see it fall!" insisted Romeo. "For goodness' sake, come and see what you do for Marse Morse!"

He was so earnest that they knew not what to make of it. But at the same time they thought he must be the victim of a dream or hallucination.

"You heard it come down?" said Daw, as he pulled on a coat.

"Me see it," said Romeo. "Jes as me turn de corner, dere it was comin' right ober!"

"When was that?"

"Jes dis minute. As soon as me see dat tower on de way to de groun' me come off wiff rush to get you to see what you can do."

"What on earth were you doing outside?" demanded Terry.

"Me get de mose awfulest dreams," said Romeo, "and me come in here to see if you was all right. Not seeing Marse Morse in him bed, me jess go out to see if dere was a light in de tower. Den me see it comin' ober."

"And you heard it fall?" insisted Brodie.

"Me see it!" repeated Romeo. "Dat 'nuff for me and for you, too."

But they did not believe him, and Terry having struck a light, looked at Morse's watch, which he had left behind him on a nail. It pointed to half-past eleven.

"Morse will be here at twelve," he said; "there is no need to go out, boys."

"What!" cried Romeo, "you no believe me?"

"Can't," replied Terry, as he began to take off his coat again. "If you saw the tower falling you must have heard the crash. So should we, and woke up in a hurry, I should say."

But Johnny Daw suggested that, as they were dressed, they might as well go out and see if the tower had really fallen. If it had not, he promised Romeo that he would tan his hide for him.

Romeo said they could flay him if it turned out that he had lied.

So they all went out, and, having their feet in slippers without socks, they felt the night air, which led them to again promise Romeo "something for himself if he had got them out of bed for nothing."

He was confident he was right, and ran on ahead.

Before they turned the corner they saw him standing with upraised hands, the image of alarm and astonishment.

"Come here, you unbelievers," he yelled. "De tower still fallin', but him not down."

"Bosh!" cried Terry; "he is having a game with us, or has he got at a bottle of wine somehow?"

He would have turned back, but the rest went on, and he kept them company.

As they came round by the front of the castle, they, too, were startled, for it seemed to them that the tower was falling.

It did, indeed, lean at an angle, and the walls of the battlements were rent in twain. It also seemed to be moving still. But it was stationary.

It was Brodie, first to recover from his amazement, who perceived this.

"It has got out of the perpendicular," he said, "but it hasn't fallen. Why doesn't Morse come out of it?"

This was strange, and on the impulse of the moment they all shouted "Morse! Morse!"

Their voices echoed far and wide, but there was no reply.

"There is a way into the tower," said Terry, in an agony; "does anybody know it?"

The secret had been kept from them, and none knew how an entrance was to be effected. They understood its position, but as to the method of its working they could say nothing.

"He must be there," said Daw; "suppose we shout again."

And they shouted again and yet again, without getting a reply.

Then, thinking that he might have returned to the

Long House and gone to bed, as he would do, in the dark after they left the Long House, they went thither to find him.

But Morse had not come back, and they made up their minds at all risks to go into the castle in search of him.

The tower was not down, and they hoped that, like that of Pisa, it would remain as it was. But when they got into the castle by the back entrance they found they could get no further than the doorway of the great hall, for the ceiling had fallen in and the place was blocked.

CHAPTER CCXLIV.

COOLNESS IN THE FACE OF DANGER.



APPALLING thoughts entered the minds of the four youths as they contemplated the *débris*. All sorts of evil imaginings concerning the fate of Morse troubled them.

"Of course he is not in the tower," said Johnny Daw, "and this was the way out."

"You think he is buried under this rubbish?" asked Terry, white to the lips.

"If not, where is he? I should like to know how it all happened," said Brodie.

"An earthquake, of course," replied Felton.

It was the opinion of them all, but they marvelled at their not having been disturbed by it. Wearily they turned back, and once more went to the front of the castle, where they found the tower in the same position.

"It seems to me to hang over a little more," said Daw, critically.

"I think not," returned Terry. His wish was father to the thought. "Hallo! Look up there, at the top. Somebody is leaning over."

They turned their eyes upwards, and, sure enough, there was a head projecting over the edge of the top of the tower.

And it was the head of Morse. They could make out the features, on which the moon was shining.

Before the shout that rose to their lips could be uttered his voice was heard, a little changed in tone, but recognisable.

"Is there anybody below?" he asked.

"Yes," they joyfully answered.

"Stand a little more out from the castle so that I can see you. You are in the shadow."

They shifted their ground until the moon shed its

rays upon them, and Morse from above gave vent to a cry of satisfaction.

"It does me good to see you," he said, "but you can't help me, I fear. I must get out as well as I can."

"What stops you?" asked Terry.

"The secret door has got jammed, and it won't work. I've had a fall, and hurt my arm, too. But there are no bones broken.

"What does it all mean?" cried Brodie.

"The foundations of the castle have subsided," replied Morse, "but I do not think there will be any more sinking. How does the tower look from below?"

"It seems to me," answered Terry, "that it leans a bit."

"It leans a lot. But you cannot scare me any more. It is kind of you to make light of it. However, I am not nervous."

"Can't we help you any way?"

"I don't see how."

"If you had a rope——"

"But I haven't. Not so much as a couple of yards of string. And worse than all, I wear socks, and not stockings, as Giuseppe does. I have nothing to unravel. But don't worry."

"We can't help feeling for you," groaned Terry. "Suppose——"

He stopped short, and Morse, with a light laugh, finished the sentence for him.

"Suppose the tower should come down with a run, you were going to say. My dear boy, it *won't*. If it had meant to come down with a run I think it would have finished the job right off."

"You take things coolly," said Johnny Daw, overcome with admiration.

"That is my chance. I haven't yet made up my mind how to get out. Several ways have come to me, and I must settle on the safest. What is the time?"

"Something after midnight."

"Well, don't keep out of your beds any longer. Come back in the morning and I will tell you how I am getting on."

He disappeared, and although they called to him several times he did not appear again.

They waited for a time, and then, hearing nothing of him, returned to the Long House.

Sleeping again that night was out of the question. Romeo lit the kitchen-fire and went to work preparing an early breakfast, although they had little appetite to partake of anything.

"It will be an awful thing if he is boxed up there to starve to death," said Terry.

"We may be able to get some food up to him," suggested Felton.

"How?" asked Brodie, and Felton could only shake his head.

"We want Jim Gordon here," said Terry; "he would devise some means of rescuing his chum."

"If anybody could," remarked Johnny Daw, dismally. "As soon as the day comes, if Morse is still boxed in, I shall hurry over to Jim. It is a sorry message to take to him, and so soon, too."

They sat up all night, going out at intervals to see if anything had happened. But the tower did not shift any more, and they heard nothing of Morse. Daylight came, and Johnnie Daw was about to start across the wood, when Romeo, who had gone out alone, came running in with the tidings that Morse was on the summit of the tower again and wished to speak to them. So they all went down, and were glad to see that his face, though pale for want of sleep, was composed.

Still it was a horrible sight in a sense, and gave them a feeling of weakness about the knees to see him leaning over the lower side with the wall sloping inwards under him.

"I've sent for you fellows," said Morse, "because I suspect that you are thinking of sending for Jim."

"I promised to let him know if anything happened," replied Daw, apologetically.

"Then you will oblige me by doing nothing of the sort."

"But, Morse, old man——"

"I am all right, and Jim is wanted over there. I've begun on my job, and I expect to be out before to-morrow morning. And if I am not, what can Jim do? He can no more get into the tower than yourselves. It is sealed up from the outside. Now mind this, I won't have Jim sent for."

"As you like," returned Terry, reluctantly. "We thought of it, as you two were always so good in helping each other out of a fix."

"This," returned Morse, "is a fix I must get myself out of, or remain here as I am."

He nodded to them, smiling, and disappeared. They turned away in a dissatisfied frame of mind, but they knew Morse must be obeyed, for that day at least.

Hours passed, and they saw nothing more of him. The time lagged wearily. Terry at last declared that he would run on to the chine to see how the Farrells were getting on. It would relieve the dreadful monotony of waiting.

He found them all at home, in total ignorance of anything unusual having occurred. They were very much surprised to see him, and Mr. Farrell showed some trepidation.

"Jim and the boys," said Terry, "are all right on the other side of the island, and Morse and a few of us are at the Long House."

"Good gracious! what for?" exclaimed Miss Elegantine.

"Oh, for a change of air," said Terry; "we are a

restless lot, you know. By the way, Mr. Farrell, those men you sent over to us——"

A start of surprise from the three women folk, and a sudden movement to arrest his speech on the part of Mr. Farrell, let Terry into the secret of the latter.

"I beg your pardon," said Terry, "I thought the ladies knew."

"I did not think it necessary to inform them on the subject," said Mr. Farrell, stiffly.

"But we should like to hear what it is now," intimated Mrs. Farrell.

"Three parents of the boys—ahem!" said Mr. Farrell, "landed here a short time ago. I met them as they were seeking their offspring. They asked to be directed to them, and I sent them on, as I believe direct. One of these men was your father, Terry."

"No, my father has not arrived. Nor has anybody's father, that I know of. Three starving men turned up at our present residence—three scientific men who were told that you could accommodate them with lodgings for a time, for which they were willing to pay handsomely."

"Handsomely" was Terry's own idea. He was glad of an opportunity of making Mr. Farrell vexed with his own stupidity, and he succeeded to perfection.

"Why did they not say who they were?" exclaimed Mr. Farrell, aghast. "I should have been glad of—of their companionship."

"They go back in about three weeks' time," said Terry. "Their ship will call for them."

Mr. Farrell bit his lip and walked to the door, where he stood looking out, while Terry told Eveline and her mother all they wanted to know about Gordontown. He made no reference to Morse, thinking it would do no good to alarm them. They could not in any way help him.

He did not stay long, not more than half an hour, nor did he invite the ladies to visit the Long House. Until the fate of Morse was definitely settled he left everything in abeyance.

Soon after he was gone Mr. Farrell called his wife aside, and they had a long and earnest talk together. It was about the advisability of leaving the island. When the ship came for the three scientific men she could take them off also.

There was much in the idea to commend itself to a mother. Indeed, the island was not a place for Eveline, and soon was destined to become less so. Better by far that she should leave it, if she went no further than Gibraltar.

"But it appears to me," said Mrs. Farrell, "that you were very rude to these gentlemen and deceived them. They might not be so ready to forgive you for sending them on a journey that threatened to cost them their lives. You ought to apologise."

"I will," replied Mr. Farrell, "when I see them."

"That will not do, Nap. You ought to go over to the old city and see them. I need not tell you what excuses to make: you are a past-master at making them. The journey through the wood will not kill you."

"But if I do not go——"

"They may object to our leaving by their ship."

"That settles the question," said Mr. Farrell. "Put me up a basket of provisions and something to drink by the way. I'll risk it."

He was so eager on the journey now that he could not wait until the morrow, but must needs start at once. With five hours' daylight to the good he began his journey, taking the road along the beach and up the path past the castle.

CHAPTER CCXLV.

ONE WAY OF GETTING OUT OF A FIX.



BY putting his best leg foremost Terry was home in time for dinner, and it was not good sauce to the humble fare to learn that absolutely no sign of Morse had cheered his companions during his absence.

"What has happened to him?" exclaimed Brodie. "It seems as if he had got shut in one of the chambers we have heard of. If so, he might shout himself hoarse and we not hear him."

By-and-by they went out and sat down in front of the tower. It leant away to the right, and on that ground they had no fear of its falling upon them; although, as Felton said, "when the place began to topple down, there was no knowing what tricks it might play them."

"I do not think it matters," said Terry, gloomily.

"I am not going to lose heart," said Johnny Daw, as he rolled himself a cigarette. "Morse is up to something, and you can't expect him to be trotting up and down on our account."

"He is such a fellow for surprises," exclaimed Brodie, hopefully.

It was shortly after this that Mr. Farrell came toiling up the path, with his basket of provisions strung to his back, and a strapped rug, for sleeping, in his hand.

On seeing the rent in the battlement-walls and the huge tower sloping away to the right he stopped short, and put his hand to his forehead, as if doubting the evidence of his senses.

Then seeing the boys, he came up to them and asked how the change came about. They could tell him no more than that it had happened in the night and Morse was shut up in the tower.

"It is a horrible sight!" exclaimed Mr. Farrell; "but I always feared that Morse would come to a bad ending. He would meddle with matters and things that a boy ought not to trouble himself about. He will never get out of that tower."

Mr. Farrell had never been good as a prophet, and he made a conspicuous failure on this occasion. Barely had the words left his lips when a sharp report was heard, and a big stone shot out from the side of the tower facing them, about on a level with the battlements.

Then through the hole the head of Morse appeared.

Apparently he did not see Mr. Farrell, but addressed his companions as if they had been by themselves.

"What did I tell you, boys?" he cried. "I said it would be all right, and here I am."

Yes, there he was, but he had still a considerable height to drop—fully twenty feet—and nothing below to break his fall.

But here again his ingenuity came to his aid.

Disappearing from the hole, which was about three feet square, he was absent a short time, and then reappeared pushing before him one of the iron ladders used as a staircase in the tower.

Through the top rung he had thrust a long iron rod, which he finally bent in the shape of a V, and hung the ladder out.

It dangled from the point of the V in a very insecure manner, but Morse lost no time in trusting himself to it.

He descended nimbly, and half-way down he was obliged to slide the rest of the way, as the rod above was being squeezed up by his weight.

Indeed, he and the ladder and the rod came down to the ground together. But ready hands saved him from hurt and stood him on his feet.

"Right as a trivet," he said. "Thanks, boys. It took a long time to pick out the cement between the stones, it was so mortally hard, and the blasting had to be arranged with care lest I brought the whole tower down. But I think I managed very well. What do you say?"

"I can dimly see how you worked it," replied Terry. "Morse, you are a—a—well, a scorcher at blowings-up, or blowings-down, or blowings-out. I'm a chimpanzee if you are not."

"I'm hungry," said Morse. "Had your dinner yet?"

"An hour ago. But there is plenty left for you. Oh! Morse, if you knew what we have felt!"

"I can guess, Terry, old man. And I felt a bit, too. How do you do, Mr. Farrell?"

"I am very well," answered that dismally false

prophet. "I hope this escape from an untimely end will be a lesson to you."

"Thanks; no doubt it will," drily replied Morse.

"You are going a journey, sir?"

"It is my intention to cross the forest on a visit of courtesy to the three scientific men who are on the other side of the island."

"Probably they will be glad to see you," said Morse, "especially as you deceived them as to your identity. It is no business of mine, Mr. Farrell, but I may tell you they did not like it."

"Were they *very* much annoyed?" asked Mr. Farrell.

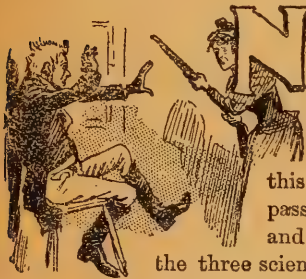
"They were not violent, but there was an ugly look about their eyes, and they are big men."

"I—I think I will defer my—my visit of courtesy," stammered Mr. Farrell, "and, with your permission I will stay awhile at the Long House. It is not often I ask a favour of you. I shall not be in the way."

"You can stay, as far as I am concerned," said Morse, as he walked on, and as the others made no objection, their old schoolmaster took it for granted that he could stay, and followed them home.

CHAPTER CCXLVI.

THE PROFESSORS' RETREAT.—MISS ELEGANTINE HEARS SOMETHING NOT TO HER ADVANTAGE.



NOTHING is easier in story-writing than to skip over dull and uninteresting periods of time. Availing ourselves of this boon, we at a bound pass over three weeks, and come to a day when

the three scientific men, accompanied by Jim, appeared at the Long House.

They had big parcels of things they had collected—plants, bits of stone, insects, and what not—with which they were delighted. The whole of this treasure was brought along on two of the sledges.

Of matters that did not concern them they had learned nothing. After the first day they did not so much as ask after Mr. Farrell, or show the least curiosity about him. Wrapped in their respective researches, they thought of little else. In the evening these things were the theme of their conversation.

The discovery of Mr. Farrell, who still lingered at the Long House, led to a few high words, it is true, but in the light of the complete success of their visit to the island they were ready to forgive him. Therefore, when he spoke of going away in the ship with them, they did not demur, save on the ground of the

boys' safety. Even then he must, like the villain in the play, dissemble.

"I am merely going as far as Gibraltar for necessities," he assured Professor Juniper. "They are quite able to take care of themselves; and, besides, the island is perfectly safe."

The sinking of the castle tower was an interesting object, but there was little time to ask much about it. On the eve of the day when they arrived at the Long House their vessel was seen in the offing, beating up against a head wind.

In two hours, or three at the outside, she would drop her anchor outside the lagoon and send a boat ashore for them.

"I think we may risk taking you on board," said the professor. "Go and get your people together."

Jim was sorry he was about to lose Eveline, but he knew it was for the best, and he sent a note for her by Romeo, who was going with Mr. Farrell to assist in bringing such luggage as they proposed to take along with them.

The pair set out for the chine, where they found Mrs. Farrell and Eveline. The latter was fully prepared to go, and on receiving the note from Romeo she stole into her room to read it.

It was a comfort for her to find that Jim approved. All he asked was that she would write to him soon, and let him know whither she had gone.

"Where is Miss Elegantine?" asked Mr. Farrell.

"She is fern-gathering in the chine, I believe," replied Mrs. Farrell.

It took an hour or more to get their few effects together and safely packed for transport.

Romeo would have to make two journeys of it, and he started off with the first lot.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Farrell suggested to his wife and daughter that they should go down to the lagoon. He would wait for Miss Elegantine and bring her along with him.

"And if you can get anyone to take you on board," he added, "go at once. It will save possible delay."

On their way thither they met Romeo, who said the ship had cast her anchor some distance from the shore, and the boat was coming into the lagoon.

So they went on, and Romeo hurried to the chine to carry out the rest of his task.

"What dis, massa?" he asked. "You put out Miss Dibble's t'ings?"

"She is not going," was the curt reply. "It is my intention to leave her behind. I have had quite enough of that offensive old woman."

He was standing by the open door as he spoke, just inside the room. It was unfortunate that he did not know that Miss Elegantine was coming leisurely home, and was just within earshot.

"You get down with that lot," continued Mr.

Farrell, "I will follow you in a moment. Before you reach the boat I shall be up to you."

"All right, massa," said Romeo. "But it not right to leab de lady behine when you and de missus and Miss Ebeline goin' 'way for good."

"Mind your own business," growled Mr. Farrell, "and do as you are told."

"Berry good," returned Romeo; "but if you sleep after dis you got no more sconshens dan a wooden dolly."

Romeo picked up the remaining packages, and went off with them. He failed to observe Miss Elegantine, who was standing close to the wall of the house with a very fixed expression of face.

She let him get fifty yards away, then slipped into the house and closed the door.

Standing against the wall within reach was the rifle Mr. Farrell had been entrusted with. As he, startled by the noise, raised his eyes from some papers he was hurriedly looking over, he saw that determined woman seize the weapon and present it at his head.

"Woman!" he cried, "are you mad?"

"No, sane as ever I was in the whole course of my life," she answered. "So you were thinking of going away?"

"I am going away," said Mr. Farrell.

"Are you? Not if I know it. Ah! I see in your eye that you think this gun isn't loaded, *but it is!* We kept a cartridge in it all the time you were away in case a troublesome stranger called, and you see we had it near the door ready for immediate use. Sit down, or I will blow your brains out!"

He sat down, white to the roots of his hair. Miss Elegantine, still keeping her weapon in a line with his head, went on in bitter tones:

"You would have left me behind? Very good. I didn't want to leave. But when you speak of me as you did to that nigger, who spoke up like a *man*, I feel my gorge rising. Oh, you cowardly scoundrel!"

"I spoke thoughtlessly," pleaded the wretched man. "If you don't want to go, why do you detain me?"

"Because I am going to stay here, and I shall want a man to run my errands and do my digging. You can have Chorker's old house, and Charley will keep you company."

A wave of violent passion swept over the face of the man, but he was cowed. He knew what a dreadfully determined woman she was, and she looked just then as if she could have shot him without the least compunction.

"You are unreasonable—you are wrong!" he cried. "Think of my wife and child!"

"I do," was the retort. "They will be better without you. If they come back I won't let you go, but

you may bet your best hat they will do nothing of the sort."

She drew up a chair, and sat down by the door with the rifle ready for use. Mr. Farrell, with a groan, bowed his head upon the table and said no more. He hoped, he was almost sure, that somebody would come for him, but twilight arrived and the chine echoed to the sound of no longed-for footstep.

Then came a scratching at the door, and Miss Elegantine opened it, letting Charley in.

The huge bear looked round the room in search of his young mistress. Not finding her, he raised his eyes inquiringly to Miss Elegantine's face.

"Your dear mistress is gone," she said, "and you can go back to the boys. Give my love to them, and say I am here alone, and Mr. Farrell has engaged himself as odd-man."

"I shall go mad!" yelled the miserable man. "Come, this jest has lasted long enough. They are waiting for me. Let me go!"

"If they have waited all this time," she answered, grimly, "you are welcome to go. But I think they have managed to depart without you."

She opened the door and he rushed out. Charley sprang after him with a growl, and brought him up sharp.

"Is this brute to detain me now?" he demanded.

"We will all go together," said Miss Elegantine.

On getting clear of the chine they had light enough to see that the ship was no longer at anchor.

Still hoping against lost hope, Mr. Farrell hied himself away to the beach by the lagoon. No boat was waiting, not a creature near.

Then he felt that the worst had happened.

The ship had sailed, and his wife and child had gone without him.

In his black fury he cursed them bitterly, but it was not their fault or anybody's fault, unless it can be put down to the captain.

Mrs. Farrell and Eveline had gone on board with the three scientific men. Jim and Morse were on the shore to bid them good-bye. Only a few words could be exchanged.

"I shall not mind your writing to Eveline," were the last words of Mrs. Farrell.

And Eveline said:

"You will not stay much longer on this dreadful island, will you?"

Jim said he thought not, but another summer there would not hurt him or anybody.

The captain received the ladies courteously enough, and conducted them to a cabin which he said they could occupy. Mr. Farrell would have to do as well as he could, chumming in with the three scientists.

Then he went on deck and waited for Mr. Farrell, who, of course, could not come.

The captain soon became impatient.

The wind was favourable, blowing off shore. After sundown it would probably change and be dead against him.

Presently he lost his temper, and declared Mr. Farrell "must follow by the next boat."

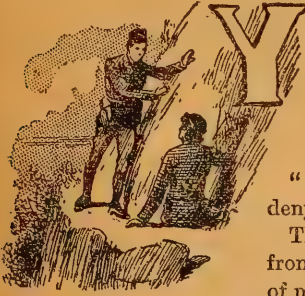
So the anchor was hoisted, and the barque sped on her way.

Fatigued with hurry and excitement, Mrs. Farrell and Eveline were having an early sleep in their cabin, unconscious that the man who had deserted them more than once in earlier days had now been left behind.

Thus did time turn the tables on a cowardly and selfish man. That which he designed for those he ought to have stood by while life lasted had fallen unexpectedly to his own lot.

CHAPTER CCXLVII.

JIM ADVISES MORSE.—STRANGE SAIL IN THE OFFING.



YOU would be mad to risk it, Morse. The tower is anything but safe. It may come down at any moment."

"So it may, Jim. I don't deny it."

The two friends sat in front of the leaning mass of masonry. Hard by them

was Johnny Daw, who had just been commenting on a declaration of Morse, made a fortnight earlier, to the effect that he was not going to leave any of his property in the castle.

"And I asked him as a particular favour," said Johnny, "not to do anything till you came over. He only smiled, but he hasn't tried to do it yet."

Morse sat upon a stone, hugging his knees, as composed as if they were discussing some ordinary matter. Jim's expostulation and his admission of the danger made no difference in his outward appearance.

"You have had one narrow escape," continued Jim, "and the memory of it would be enough for most fellows."

"And it is enough for me," replied Morse, composedly.

"Then why talk of attempting it?"

"I have not recently mentioned the subject."

Jim shrugged his shoulders, and got upon his feet.

"All the more reason why I feel sure you mean to attempt it," he said. "I know your ways. Of course, you did not mention it to me, because you would know my opinion of risking your life. I am sure the

tower is more on the lean than it was since I arrived here two days ago."

"Perhaps it is," agreed Morse, "and it will have to be fully three feet more over ere it comes down."

"I shall insist on your going back with me!" said Jim, hotly.

"Will you?"

"Yes. Johnny and the others will suffice to remain here."

"There is at least no fear of their attempting to visit the tower."

"Not such fools," said Johnny; and seeing the friends were on the verge of a warm discussion, he walked away, leaving them together.

The moment he was out of sight, the manner of Morse changed. He rose, and took Jim by the arm.

"Come for a little stroll with me," he said.

"But promise me you will give up the idea," insisted Jim.

"Come with me first, and then you will allow me to do as I please."

"I shall not change my mind."

Morse led him round to the back of the castle and along the top of the cliff in the direction of the chine. Jim went, wondering what new thing was in store to surprise him.

About a furlong from the castle, Morse led him to the edge of the cliff where it had less precipitousness than along the greater portion of the route.

"Mind how you come," he said.

"Are you going to descend here?"

"A part of the way."

He began the descent, and Jim followed to about a third of the way down. There they came to a narrow ledge, on which Morse halted. Close by them was a narrow opening just wide enough for Morse to squeeze himself through. Jim immediately entered also, and found himself in a small cave about the size of the banqueting-hall of the castle, but with a lower ceiling.

There was just light enough for him to make out its proportions, and also to see that the floor was strewn with all sorts of things of the class Morse used to have in his laboratory.

"Nothing is in order yet," he said, as he struck a match and lighted a lamp that was fixed to the stone wall, "but I can see to that at my leisure."

"Who the deuce would have thought of your having such a drum as this?" exclaimed Jim.

"Haven't had it long," was the laconic answer.

"See this ladder? Looks home-made, doesn't it?"

It was simply two poles with rough staves nailed upon them, the whole thing a very amateurish affair.

"I made it myself when the other fellows were asleep," explained Morse. "Nightwork suits me."

Jim was as mystified as ever. Morse burst out laughing.

"Can't you guess now?" he cried.

"No. I am, as you know, a duffer at conundrum guessing."

"My dear old Jim, *the job's done*. I have cleared the tower. All nightwork, and this is the secret laboratory of the magician. It is only known to you and me, and there is no need to worry others about it."

"Well, I'm bothered!" was all Jim could say.

"First of all," said Morse, "I made the ladder. It is long enough to reach the hole I made in the wall. Every night for a week, after the other fellows were asleep, I did two hours' work, and I had to be careful how I carried some of the things, you know. With a portion I could hurry up, and I conveyed the whole shoot here without one of the boys being the wiser. Ha! ha!"

Jim tilted his cap over his eyes and rubbed his head. He was pleased, of course, but the whole thing was so astonishing that he had not a word to say.

"I thought it better not to keep them in a state of everlasting anxiety about my safety, and that was why I did the job at night-time. Some people would say that I had been very thoughtful of others, instead of blinking at me like an owl."

"I can't help it," said Jim. "You give me such staggerers."

"And the joke of it is this," continued Morse, "that I supplied those fellows with saltpetre to mix with the charcoal for me, and not one thought of asking me where it came from. Now, Jim, the danger of losing my life in the tower is over, and I hope your mind is easy."

"I can't tell you what a relief it is to me," returned Jim.

"You will not hesitate to leave me here on guard now?"

"Of course not."

They left the cave, and Morse, instead of attempting to reascend the cliff, slipped over the side of the ledge and slid to the sands below. Jim was soon at his side, and they sauntered up the beach towards the castle-path.

"I wonder," he exclaimed, suddenly, "how the Farrell's are getting on?"

Morse burst into another fit of laughter, which led Jim to stare at him with renewed surprise.

"What is there to laugh at?" he inquired.

"I am laughing at Farrell, not you, and thereby hangs another tale, Jim. You remember the day we saw Eveline off?"

"Am I likely to forget it?"

"Well, as you may remember, having seen her and Mrs. Farrell away, none of us stopped to bother about Dibble's aunt or Nap. They are both still here."

"Here?"

"I met Miss Dibble about a week ago, and it gave

me a facer, I can tell you. She told me she had kept Farrell back because he had been rude to her, or something of that sort. She did not mean herself to go away. They are still in the chine."

Jim looked vexed, but he laughed in spite of the feeling.

"She shut him in the house," said Morse, "and threatened to blow his brains out if he tried to leave. So the ship went without him."

"You did not tell me this before."

"I have not told anyone. And truth to tell, we have been so busy the last two days that it went right out of my head."

"But those two living together!"

"Miss Elegantine has the house and Farrell is her odd-man. She makes him job about the garden."

And Morse broke out in a way very unusual with him, laughing until the tears ran from his eyes.

Jim laughed, too, but he would rather that their old schoolmaster had taken himself off, and keep away for good and all.

"It is a fitting punishment," continued Morse; "he was so eager to get out of the place, and after all the tricks he has played, to be left behind is the funniest thing I ever heard of."

"Well, they can fight it out together," said Jim.

They walked back to the Long House by the familiar path, and, as the day was drawing to an end, they went in, and the gate of the stockade was closed for the night.

On the morrow it was Jim's intention to return to the ancient city.

In the course of conversation the name of Oka Wallah cropped up, and the probability of his having reached his native shores was discussed. He had certainly, it appeared, taken a boat and got away, but the chances of his reaching the African coast were considered to be limited.

"But if he has landed there," said Terry "will he venture to return?"

"Juniper said he would," replied Jim, "but I think he will be contented with getting back to his own people."

It was strange that on that night of all they seemed to be unable to talk of little else than the Missing Link.

If they changed the subject they soon returned to it, until at last Jim said he had had enough of him and all his works.

"Blow the Link," he said, "shoot him! hang him! If he ventures here with any of his crew we must see that *they do not go back again*. Now let us talk of something else."

But although they did so, Oka Wallah was in their minds when awake and kept with some of them in their dreams.

In the morning Jim was quietly awakened by Romeo. It was barely light.

"Me no able to sleep, Marse Jim," he whispered in his ear, "so me get up and go out. You come 'long. *Dere am sumfin for you to see.*"

Jim got up, and, with a few of his upper garments on, followed Romeo to the gate of the stockade, which the nigger had thrown open.

"Down dere, on de sea, Marse Jim," said Romeo.

And Jim looked. In the offing, a few miles from the shore, were a number of boats, perhaps ten in all; and they bore a strong resemblance to the class of vessel in which the Ouram Dervish chief had previously visited the island.

They were not English, nor Spanish, nor Italian.

The square shape of the craft, and the heavy, yet gorgeous, stubby sails, bespoke their origin. They were Moorish without the shadow of a doubt.

CHAPTER CCXLVIII.

THE PREPARATIONS TO RECEIVE THE UNWELCOME VISITORS.



ROUSE the others," said Jim, "and bring me my binoculars." Romeo sped into the Long House, and in two minutes the rest came tumbling out in varied conditions of disorderly attire.

Romeo had announced a perfect fleet of warships approaching.

It was not so bad as that, but it was serious enough in all conscience.

Jim had already been able to make out that there were at least a hundred swarthy men in the boats. There might indeed be more, for the sides were high, and many were possibly hidden from sight.

One thing was comforting. They were not making for the lagoon, but for the old landing-place where Oka Wallah had made preparations for the sacrifice of the calf.

Probably some superstitious feeling governed the choice of a landing-place, but it was certain that to the island they were coming.

Another thing was in temporary favour of our friends. The wind was shifty, veering from one quarter to another, a sure indication of prospective storm or a spell of rougher weather.

But although it was reasonable to assume that it was Oka Wallah returning to avenge what he considered to be an insult, there was still an outside

chance of the occupants of the boats being entire strangers.

Some definite information on that head was necessary ere Jim and his friends retreated through the wood. As they were weak in numbers no other step was possible in the presence of a comparatively powerful foe.

Terry and Johnny Daw were therefore sent on to the far end of the cliff by the chine, to get a nearer view of the coming strangers, with instructions to give Mr. Farrell or Miss Elegantine warning to retreat also, should there be any cause for alarm.

Terry took the binoculars with him, and they hastened away.

Preparations to retreat, if necessary, were begun at the Long House, and several hours burdened with a natural anxiety passed away. They lost sight of the boats as they were beating upward, so that the castle shut them out of sight.

The better part of the day was gone when the two scouts came back with the intelligence that the newcomers had just effected a landing, when they turned back. That would, of course, be at least two hours earlier.

Nothing had been seen of Mr. Farrell or his companion in the chine. Terry went down before the boats landed, and found the house closed.

"They must take their chance," said Jim.

"What of Oka Wallah?" inquired Morse.

"We closely examined every man ashore," replied Terry, "and could find no one resembling him. There are at least a hundred of the beggars, tall, savage-looking fellows, such as we see in pictures of Bedouins."

"They were pitching tents as we came away," said Johnny, "but only for the night, I reckon."

"Our better course," said Jim, "is to return to the city."

They were not powerful enough to cope with the enemy, if an enemy the body of strangers proved to be, and the decision was a wise one. Accordingly, for the second time the Long House was closed and deserted.

Romeo would not leave the calf behind him, and instead of driving it as his grandfather had attempted to do, pig fashion, he led it with a halter round its neck.

An hour before nightfall they started, and having journeyed a few miles into the wood halted to sleep. As a precaution, a watch was kept in turns throughout the night, but there was no break in upon the stillness of the wood.

On the morrow early they resumed their journey, Morse going on ahead with a sledge of his own, on which he carried some of his especial properties, which he had fetched from his latest chosen laboratory.

The calf behaved admirably. Indeed, it showed a strong desire to get forward, as if conscious of approaching danger. Romeo was elated beyond measure.

"Me reckon dat gran'fader now see who am de superior member ob de fam'ly," he said; "it take some ob de receipt out ob de ole man."

Another night in the wood, and no alarm. If they were being tracked, they had kept well ahead of the pursuers. That was certain, and on the next morning, about three hours after sunrise, they re-entered the gates of Gordontown.

"Every gate must be closed and made fast," said Jim, "and a complete survey of the city taken to see where the places of weakness are."

They had been seen, of course, and the whole of their friends had come down to meet them.

The elation of the first few minutes took a more subdued form when it became known that another party of strangers had invaded the island. But it was not made a matter of expressed fears.

But Giuseppe was especially very uneasy, and he walked back in silence behind Jim and Morse.

A council of war was promptly held, and after a rest of two hours, much needed, Jim and Daw went the round of the city.

On three sides they knew there were high blank walls, but the possibility of there being a breach or an accessible spot was apparent. Morse, with Martin and the other men, Giuseppe alone excepted, wended their way to the front to close and make the gates ready for immediate securing if needed.

On mature thought all were fastened except one, against which they pitched the tent recently occupied by Oka Wallah, and Brodie and Trimmer took up their temporary abode therein; one to be on the watch, turn and turn about, until further orders.

Meanwhile, Romeo had conveyed the calf to the Hall of Justice, and duly worried the aged Macbeth on the subject of his lack of driving capacity. Macbeth, if he had possessed the evil eye, could not have looked at the innocent creature with more malevolence.

"Bout two ounces of arsenic do de brute good," he muttered, and Romeo, grinning all over his face, led his charge away to the house where the fowls were kept, and there turned a room into a stall for it.

Morse's task was early completed, for the gates generally closed easily. But there was one weak point in the front armour of the city. It was the place where he brought Giuseppe and his then followers to confusion by blowing up the gates.

It was not an open way, exactly, for the stonework and the bronzework lay in a confused heap which would have to be scaled. That, however, would be no great task for active, courageous men.

Something must be done to strengthen it, or to make it dangerous to endeavour to pass over.

Morse always took time by the forelock, and as he had two hours at his disposal ere the sun set, he selected something from his store of useful things, and with Martin went down to the spot.

They were busy until it was dark, and up to then there was no sign of anyone coming by way of the wood. Shortly after Jim and Daw returned and reported that, without scaling-ladders or making a breach, it was next to impossible for anyone to gain access to the city.

Up to midnight several of the boys assisted Morse in making powder in the Hall of Justice, with a light at a safe distance. The rest burnished their rifles and saw that the locks were in order.

A strong wind was blowing from the wood, and sounds in that direction would assuredly be conveyed to them, but they heard nothing.

The signal of danger from the two sentinels in the tent, the firing of a rifle, was not needed, as far as they knew. True to their duty, the pair kept a faithful lookout.

At the hall another set of sentinels were appointed, consisting of Dibble, Dawson, Brodie, and Felton. They, too, had a light task, for the night passed by without alarm. But with the coming of the morning all this was changed.

Before the low-lying mists had fully cleared away so that those on the higher ground could see the wood, the report of a rifle was heard from the direction of the tent. In three minutes all were awake and hurrying to the outside of their respective abodes, some imperfectly attired, but all carrying arms.

They hastened to the broad steps outside the Hall of Justice, where Jim and many others had already assembled.

CHAPTER CCXLIX.

THE TENTS OF THE ENEMY.—AN OFFER OF PEACE.



MORSE had already gone down to the one pair of gates left unsecured. It would not take long to close them, and when shut the fastenings were not visible from the outside. There were springs both top and bottom, of great strength, and not easily moved, save by those who knew the trick of them. And that Martin had discovered.

It was tantalising to those by the Hall of Justice to

have to wait, for it was not by any means clear to them why the alarm had been given.

The misty veil was still hanging about the wood, as it rolled up from the lower ground.

But suddenly, as they watched, they saw a flag rise out of the dispersing mist. It was fluttering on the top of a slender pole, and Jim, with his binoculars, made out a serpent worked thereon.

Still he knew not with whom he had to deal.

It was a strange sign to him, and not, as far as he knew, connected with any race on earth at that time.

Lower sank the mist, and out of it there slowly appeared the upper halves of a score of tents, each with a small flag fluttering on its top. They were perfectly plain but varying in colour. They were very gorgeous, and each large enough to easily accommodate a dozen men.

The flag first seen fluttered from a pole thrust into the ground in front of the largest tent of all.

Near it stood a man in Arab dress, and he was alone. On his shoulder he carried a long rifle. He stood as motionless as a statue.

No other stranger was to be seen.

But the silence kept in their coming could not fail to make an impression. There was something awe-inspiring in it. Evidently a determined foe had arrived. It could not be chance that brought them there, to pitch their tents like ghosts at midnight.

Morse soon returned, before the strangers could be discussed, indeed, and brought with him Brodie and Trimmer.

"They could do no good below," he said; "if it comes to defending ourselves, it must be done *here*."

"It will not be possible for them to scale the gates, I suppose?" asked Daw.

"The tops are one mass of bristling bronze," replied Morse. "There is neither foot nor handhold."

"How came you to see them first?" asked Jim of Trimmer.

"I went out under cover of the mist," replied Trimmer, "fancying I heard a sound. It was like a suppressed cough. I had a narrow escape of walking right into the arms of their sentry, but fortunately he did not see me, and I got back without creating a disturbance. Then we closed the gates and I gave the signal."

"They are coming out!" cried Martin.

The occupants of the tents were emerging into the open air.

They brought little mats with them, on which they knelt and remained with bowed heads for a few moments, performing their orisons.

Then they sprang up, tossed the mats back into the tents, and proceeded to light fires.

"While they breakfast there is no need for us to

remain hungry. Romeo, bring us something along, just anyhow, as we must eat where and how we can."

He was occupied the next ten minutes in scanning the foe through his binoculars, but he could not decide upon their race. Perhaps Giuseppe could, and he called to him by name.

But there was no answer, and it was soon discovered that Giuseppe was not with them, nor had he been seen since the previous evening. And it was Chorker who saw him last.

"He was a-moving down towards the tent," he said, "just as if he was goin' to pay a visit there. I didn't see him come back agen."

"Why didn't you speak of it before?" demanded Jim.

"Well," answered Chorker, "I niver got much before by interferin' with other people's business unless it was hard knocks and abuse, and I didn't feel I durst risk it. He was moving along in a sneaky kind of way."

"It was his cough you heard," said Jim to Trimmer. "Arabs, if that is the breed of these fellows, never cough."

"It was not misty early in the night," said Brodie, "anyway, nothing to speak of. Had he come near us I must have seen him. We both sat up all night. It was not easy to sleep."

"But why should he go at all?" was an almost general question.

"Had enough of fighting, I suppose," said Chorker.

Jim Gordon said nothing. He feared in his heart that Giuseppe had at last deserted them. And he could overlook it. The man had done enough, and more than enough, to show his gratitude for one act of kindness. Still it did not seem like Giuseppe. But he was gone. There was no doubt about it, and in moody silence the breakfast was hurriedly partaken of.

Then, as there was no movement on the part of the foe, measures for defending the Hall of Justice were discussed. Every available thing that would hold drinking-water was made use of, the three niggers filling them at the fountain. Having the store of food already there, no anxiety was entertained on that account.

The pigs and the fowls would have to be left, and of neither would their enemies probably take heed. But the calf was another thing, and that was temporarily conveyed into the hall.

The only available thing to block the entrance of the hall was a bronze gate, one of the pair lying on the stone flooring. By placing it lengthways, it would make a sort of defensive gridiron, through the openings of which a very effective fire could be kept up—while their ammunition lasted.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.

The Island School.



"All in, Jim, for the life of us," said Morse. "THE ENEMY ARE IN THE CITY!"

Their store was not great, notwithstanding their labours the previous evening, but, as Morse sententially remarked:

"They had enough if the boys fired low and did not miss the target."

They tried their united strength upon the gate, with the result that they discovered they could just put it into its place. Before they could do so, however, it was observed that a solitary man, bearing a white flag, was coming down the slope.

"A flag of peace!" cried a dozen voices.

"If it is not the ruse of treachery," said Jim, quietly. "I will go down to him."

So he hurried down to the level ground, and saw the messenger with the white flag, approaching the gate recently closed.

On seeing Jim, he halted within speaking distance, and bowed low. Jim raised his cap, and waited for him to speak.

The bearer of the flag was a tall man, with a dark beard and a swarthy skin; but it struck Jim that he had not the appearance of either an Arab or a Moor. It was scarcely a surprise to him when he heard the man begin to speak in perfect English.

"I am here," he said, "to confer with your leader."

"I," said Jim, "am the leader here."

A look of surprise passed over the man's face. But he made no remark on the strangeness of Jim being chief, save asking "if there were not men within the town?"

"Some," said Jim; "not many."

"I am glad to hear it. I would not care to draw my sword against boys alone."

"You are no man to draw it against your own countrymen on behalf of a lot of savages."

"Ha! you know me. You recognise Fornshaw the Renegade?" cried the stranger.

Jim made no reply. The other resumed, in savage tones:

"If I am a renegade, it was the unjust dealings of my countrymen that made me what I am. But a truce to this. I am here on behalf of Oka Wallah, chief of the Dervishes of Ouram."

"So he is here," said Jim, contemptuously. "We named him the Missing Link."

"He may be a link between man and devil," said the renegade; "but now for the time he is a man. He is here to destroy you all unless you listen to reason."

"What does he call reason?" asked Jim.

"You must capitulate to him."

"On what terms?"

"You must trust to his mercy."

"And what mercy might we expect from him?"

Fornshaw laughed harshly, and paused a moment ere he replied.

"For some of you, the mercy that the tiger shows to its prey. To others the joys of being sold into slavery."

"That is his message?"

"No, it is my revelation. Relying on my hatred of my race and nation, he sends me here to-day to cajole you. But he trusts to a reed that can bend at a moment when the better thought is uppermost. Defend yourselves to the last—die a score deaths rather than fall into his power."

"That is kindly of you," said Jim. "Why do you so far befriend us?"

"What matters?" was the reply. "I do it. When the time for the struggle comes, I feel sure that you, and all with you, will carry yourselves bravely. At such a time I have a favour to ask of you."

"A strange time for favours."

"An opportune time for the favour I ask. Shoot me like the dog I am, and rid the world of a renegade villain."

"But you tell me you were wronged."

"No wrong will justify a man deserting his country for its foes. Enough! I take back the message that you refuse Oka Wallah's message of peace. Farewell!"

He swung round, and, lowering the flag of truce, strode up the hill, Jim's eyes followed him wonderingly.

"A strange fellow to come here as our enemy," he murmured. "A renegade, a traitor. No, I will not think ill of him. And yet he will come here with Oka Wallah and his crew to destroy us. What if we should meet? Could I grant him the favour he asks? I might, but——"

And Jim, with an impatient movement, turned round on his heel and hastened back to his friends.

CHAPTER CCL.

THE ATTACK.—OKA WALLAH IS THE VICTIM OF A SURPRISE.



JIM succeeded in getting back to the hall ere Fornshaw the Renegade had scaled the slope. The latter walked in a dignified manner, slowly and impressively, in harmony with Eastern ideas.

To be in a hurry is to the Oriental a sign of inferiority, especially when on a mission that may be described as official.

On his return there emerged from the largest tent

a figure gorgeously arrayed in a long garment of scarlet silk, and wearing a turban of orange colour. It was Oka Wallah, and Jim could just make his features out with the aid of his binoculars.

But there was a great change in his facial appearance.

The form of feature could not be altered, and it was still hideous, but a repose, a sort of film of calm, was over the face of this strange man, that gave him an air of authority, coupled with dignified power.

Fornshaw bowed thrice ere he spoke, and although his words could not be heard by Jim, or perhaps understood if he had heard them, he could guess their portent.

With a hand upraised he delivered the reply, and when he concluded with a bow, Oka Wallah turned to his followers, who had gathered in groups within easy distance of him, and said a few words that set the whole in a blaze.

The outburst that followed was as sudden as the explosion of a powder-magazine. As one man they threw up their arms, and in each hand was a glittering sword, the blade broad and strong.

It was a sight that well might have awed older people than the boys who were watching the scene. No doubt there was a feeling of apprehension, very justifiable under the circumstances, in their young hearts.

But no sound escaped them. The only sign of emotion was a slight restless movement. The men drew a deep breath, and Chorker uttered a groan.

He cast an eye about him, as if seeking for some way out of the peril he saw at hand. What could those sixty boys, though aided by some half-dozen men, do against this horde of terrible savages?

It might be that they were worse than ordinary savages. At any rate, they were strong in numbers, and fully armed after their fashion.

"In a hand-to-hand fight," said Jim, in an undertone to Morse, who was standing quietly by his side, "we could have no chance."

"No," assented Morse. "But it hasn't come to that yet."

Martin drew up to them. His brow was dark, and there was a slight quivering of his under-lip as he made a suggestion that was in his mind:

"Could we not try the vanishing trick again?"

"There is no time, as far as I can see," replied Jim. "No doubt the attack will be made at once. How could we get our stores below in the comparatively few minutes we have to spare?"

"It will come to a fight," remarked Morse, calmly. "But they will not get as far as this spot to day."

Among the rest there was some whispering, but nobody had any suggestions to make. They left everything to Jim and Morse.

"If they cannot pull as through," said Ganthony, "it is all over with us."

And his eyes were dim as he thought of this possible ending to their pleasant life upon the island.

"The beggars are going to have some music before they start," said Daw, suddenly. "There is a fellow coming out of a tent with a drum."

It was so, and others were producing instruments made of reed or bamboo. There were also two harps. They began to play, and the monotonous beat of the drum was clearly heard, with an undercurrent of soft, weird melody from the other instruments.

Squatting on the ground, the rest of the horde listened awhile without movement, but ere long they sprang to their feet as one man and began to dance.

Not as men dance as a rule, but wildly and furiously, as fiends in their revels.

There did not seem to be any method in their movements, but they leapt, and capered, and rolled about, each one, in a Terpsichorean sense, a law unto himself.

The music ceased, and the antics, so impressive at the time, came to an end. Oka Wallah placed himself at the head of his men.

Once more he spoke to them, briefly, but it appeared terribly to the point, for up went their gleaming swords again, shaking and flashing in the sunlight of a day much too glorious for murderous deeds.

The weapons were then returned to their sheaths, and each man shouldered a long rifle, of the fashion of those so much in use by desert Dervishes until a few years ago.

On they came, with Oka Wallah at their head, chanting a war-song. They walked without any military order, as we accept it, in threes and fours or more behind their chief, who, as he came down the slope, looked ahead at the walls of the city, and, as he must have seen that all the gates were closed, it was not a matter of surprise that he eventually chose to attempt to gain an entrance to the city by the heap of ruins where Morse a short time before, with Martin for an assistant, had been so busy.

"We cannot see what will happen here. Let us go down nearer."

It was Morse who spoke, and every eye was turned upon him with astonishment.

"You need not fear," he said; "they will not come further than the ruined gate to-day—for many hours, in any case. We shall have time to get back here and barricade the hall."

They knew him too well to think that he spoke lightly, and as he moved forward they followed, each with his rifle loaded.

Romeo walked by Jim's side, armed with an axe. Further behind came Hamlet and Macbeth carrying similar weapons. None of the niggers were experts

with firearms, and, in case of accidents, had not been entrusted with them. Chorker managed to shuffle to the rear, and, unperceived, he dodged back into the hall.

"When the wust comes to the wust," he muttered, "I shall move into that 'ere cellar. It ain't inwiting, but it will be better than being made mincemeat of by that lot of blackguards."

Ever ready to lay out the future to his own advantage, he conceived it just possible that the Dervishes, as the enemy was now named by common consent, would succeed in getting the upper hand, and having killed every one of his associates, go away and leave him unhurt.

Morse chose, for seeing the attempt to enter the city, the spot whereon he and others had camped for a night late in the previous year. It was a broad stone level, it might be termed a terrace, wide and long enough to hold them all, and, as he judged, out of the line of fire from the foe.

Indeed, there was little apprehension from the Dervishes on that score, for, having come down close to the city, there was the intervening wall.

They could only fire through the gap, and to do that much with effect, must scale the heap of fallen stonework.

By skirting the right-hand side of the square the youngsters succeeded in getting down to the lower end of it unseen by the descending foe. From thence the narrow streets hid them from view.

"Make no noise, or as little as possible," was the command given by Jim. "No talking."

And dumbly, with careful tread, they pursued their way. The stone terrace was attained, and they gathered there, a silent, eager throng, with hearts that beat faster than usual.

A hundred yards to the right lay the heap of ruins over which the enemy must come. They could hear the soft tread of the Dervishes, who walked now as the boys had done, in absolute silence. The latter could even tell that they were gathering in order under the walls, probably to make a concerted rush upon the city.

Then came an absolute stillness that might have lasted a minute, perhaps more. It was broken by the sound of the drum, soft and low, as if tapped lightly by the man who governed its dreary tone with his fingers.

Yet another minute, and then a terrific yell was heard, and it was immediately followed by the sound of feet scampering up the stonework.

"Look out for falling stones!" cried Morse. Silence was no longer necessary. "I have arranged for them to be blown outside, but one cannot be sure of everything."

A swarthy face appeared above the ruins, another,

and another. Twenty rifles were levelled at them.

"Don't waste your powder!" sang out Morse, angrily. "Please to wait for the command to fire."

Immediately he had spoken one of the enemy gained the summit and espied the boys. He yelled at them, and they answered with a shout.

Passion gleamed on all their young faces, and they impatiently waited for the word. But it was not given.

Jim knew exactly what was expected to happen. Morse had confided everything to him.

One, two, three, four men on the summit, a crowd of faces behind them, lighted up with the lust of blood, which is called the spirit of warfare.

"Now watch," cried Morse, as one who is about to exhibit an interesting experiment.

He spoke just in time, for, as the last word burst from his lips, the whole mass of ruin suddenly rose into the air, and a part of the wall on either side toppled outward.

Men were tossed into the air, where they were seemingly performing strange feats of twisting and turning. After that there was a cloud of smoke and dust, a chorus of yells and groans, and the shower of stones began.

But none fell near the boys. The plans of Morse had been too well laid, and the work too well done, for failure or mishap to ensue.

The loud pattering on the ground outside was as the sound of sharp beating on some soft substance by hands wielding clubs. By the moans and cries of the fallen and the terror-stricken, one might have thought that it was human beings who were being cruelly chastised.

And the foe for the time was beaten. The main body was in retreat to their tents, leaving twenty or more of their brother Dervishes behind them.

Morse with his eager eyes endeavoured to pierce the smoke and dust to see the full effect of his handiwork.

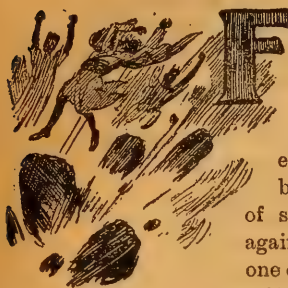
Of the retreat of the foe he was assured, for he, the coolest of all there, had already marked the sounds of their flight. But now he wanted to measure the results of his plans, so as to understand the full force of the explosive agent he had employed.

The wind was not strong now, but it soon dispersed the smoke, and the dust sank heavily to the ground, lying thickly everywhere around, and at last the scene of the explosion was made visible to the watchers on the terrace.



CHAPTER CCLI.

AFTER THE EXPLOSION.—A TIME OF REST, BRIEF BUT
WELCOME.—A MORNING SURPRISE.



FULLY were the anticipations of Morse realised. Of all who had essayed to ascend the ruins not one escaped with life. All had been buried under the mass of stonework that had been again subject to the action of one of his powerful explosives.

Nor was this all. On either side, as previously mentioned, a portion of the wall had fallen, and under these additional ruins many men must have been buried. Three had been killed by falling stones, which were for the most part of considerable size and weight.

It was not a pleasing sight, save in the sense that it represented a temporary defeat of the Dervishes.

As Morse calculated, they had retreated under the fear inspired by a complete and terrible surprise. But it could hardly be expected that they would depart, for they were of a race that comes and comes again, sometimes until scarce a man is left, to make a hopeless attempt to gain the victory.

Projecting from the ruins were portions of the men who had met their fate. Here an arm, there a leg, and, in two instances, a head. But there was no sign of life anywhere.

"We may go back, boys," said Morse, in a subdued tone. "We can rest for a few hours now."

So they went back, and some hastened up to the hall, feeling they would be more secure there. Jim, Morse, and many others lingered by the fountain, where they sat upon the edge of it, or lay about the flags talking of the last exploit of the young chemist, who wore his honours modestly.

"It is nothing," he said. "I did it as much to save my own life as yours. And I take no real pleasure in killing the veriest savage."

"But it seems it must be done," remarked Felton. "I hope the beggars will cut it now."

"They won't," said Morse, decisively.

"But surely," argued Terry, "they realise that what has happened to some of them may happen to all?"

"The race, or races, of the desert rarely think over anything to reason out a subject," said Morse. "I have read as much in books written by men who knew. The Dervishes retreated as so many lions or tigers might have done, but they will come again."

"And the way is open now," remarked Dawson, "unless you can prepare another mine for them."

"They will not venture the same way again," said Morse, "and there again they resemble the wild beast. A road once dangerous is always dangerous in their eyes."

"How did you work the business?" asked Trimmer.

"Ah!" answered Morse, smiling, "you want to know too much. Perhaps Martin will tell you."

"Blessed if I know much about it," said Martin.

"I helped by making holes, and you did the rest."

"But why keep it a secret?" asked Dibble.

"Because it is a class of work that requires three qualities—knowledge, coolness, and experience. In your hands the materials I use would soon put you to rest. I assure you that I tested the explosive long ago in a mild form, and it then appalled me; but I have gone on and on strengthening it, until only one used to it, and absolutely without fear when handling such things, ought to touch it."

"And you see no fear?" said Dibble, admiringly.

"Not when handling my specialities," said Morse, simply, "but I have a mortal dread of a bullet or a knife."

They ceased talking, for the Dervishes were playing music again. It was enough to make the listeners melancholy, and was doubtless a wail for the dead.

"We shall not be troubled by them again," said Morse. "I mean to-day, of course. They will mourn until sundown, and unless some mad fanatic of their number elects to steal in at night on the chance of quietly stabbing some of us while we sleep, we are free to live another day."

They went up to the hall in a body, for it was the better place to rest in during the heat of the day.

Jim and Morse retired to their chamber to have a quiet, confidential chat, leaving instructions for them to be summoned if there was a sign of movement on the part of the foe. As they entered it they heard a slight grating sound in the corner.

"What is that?" asked Jim.

"The stone trap moved," answered Morse, softly. "Somebody is beneath it."

For a moment they stood still, filled with turbid thought. Then Morse stole up to it and lay down listening. He remained thus for a short time, and then returned to Jim's side.

"It is not quite closed," he whispered, "and there is a fellow breathing hard just below it. I know that breathing. It is the grampus-like puffing of Chorker when he is scared."

Jim's brow darkened.

"What is he doing down there?" he muttered.

"Skulking, I should say."

"Is there any way of stopping the stone from sliding?"

"Nothing easier. Insert a piece of thin iron in the groove—a pocket-knife would do—and the thing is done."

Jim walked up to the trap, and remarking to Morse in a casual way that he had left the trap open, closed it and thrust his pocket-knife into the crevice.

The blade acted like a wedge, and a dozen Chorkers could not have forced the trap by ordinary means.

"Let him stop there," said Jim.

Presently they heard the old skulker scratching at the stone as if endeavouring to force it back. Then he tapped, but no notice was taken of it until Romeo appeared with dinner for them on a tray.

"It come to me as a inkspertation," he said, "dat you like to hab it 'lone to-day. Dere nuffin doin' outside but de tum-tum ob de drum. Marse Morse, you kind ob lifted de ha'r ob some ob dem. Gorly pumkins! what dat tapping dere?"

It was Chorker at it again. He was getting into a state of anxiety, and rather suspected that he was shut down for good. Jim explained to Romeo who it was, and a grin spread over the darkie's face.

"Keep him dere till de mornin', Marse Jim," he whispered, "den me let him out."

"Many things may happen before the morning," remarked Morse, "but he may as well stop there. Only you need not mention it."

He, like Jim, was bent on punishing Chorker for his cowardice, although nothing in that way seemed to do him good. He was incorrigible.

Romeo said he "not likeler to spoil a bit ob fun he wanted for hissef," and added that his father and grandfather were in such a state that they could not see a joke in anything just then.

"Dey 'fraid ob being tuk 'way into slabery if dem niggers on de hill get hole ob dem," whispered Romeo; "we all 'fraid ob dat. Better to die."

"Quite right," said Jim; "but, Romeo, be comforted. It may not come to either thing."

The day passed. We hurry over it because nothing happened, and all through it the melancholy melody—Terry called it "infernal music"—was kept up by the Dervishes. At sundown it ceased, and then our friends hoisted up the big bronze gate, and barricaded the entrance to the hall.

No lights were permitted, save in the back chambers, and Terry, with a dozen of his companions with loaded rifles, watched half the night through. Then they were relieved by Ganthony and others, who also had an undisturbed time of it.

The dawn came after an apparently very long night, and Ganthony, peering through the open-work of the gate, gazed in the direction of the Dervish camp.

It was no longer there. In the darkness of the night they had folded their tents and stolen silently away.

CHAPTER CCLII.

THE FEAR OF TRICKERY.—ROMEO DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF AS A VOLUNTEER SCOUT.



GANTHONY could hardly believe his eyes, and the rush of pleasure he felt nearly choked him.

The feeling of relief almost overpowered him.

"Gone," he cried, "and we are free again."

"What are you talking about?" sleepily inquired Rainstone, who was one of the guard. Night-watching had made him long for rest, and he was lying on the stone flooring upon his back.

"The Dervishes have cut it," explained Ganthony.

"Gammon!"

"Come and see for yourself."

Rainstone came and saw for himself, and all his sleepiness departed from him.

"I'll let Jim know," he said.

In two minutes everybody was aroused, and the vanishment made known to them. As with Ganthony, the sense of relief quite overpowered many of the youngsters, but Morse and Jim, to their surprise, showed no elation.

"Boys," said Jim, "you jump too quickly to a conclusion. Those fellows are not far away. It is a trick to draw us out of our lair."

There was so much probability in the suggestion, that the general elation manifestly subsided. With an enemy playing cunning it would be more difficult than ever to know what to do.

The prevailing assumption was that, provided Jim was right, the Dervishes had taken to the woods, there to bide their time. They were still strong enough to be assured of victory in an open combat with the boys. In ambush only one side had the least chance, and that was theirs.

Since Giuseppe's departure Jim had not named him, but he thought of the man now with an additional tinge of bitterness. It seemed as if the astute Spaniard had recognised that the end was near. On paper, the Dervishes must prevail.

As on the day previous there was absolutely nothing to do. The boys hung about the hall in a listless, do-nothing manner, whiling away the time in the way most suited to their dispositions.

Satisfied with his inspection of the wall, Jim feared no attack from the front, and all day long he was keeping watch over the wood.

But it revealed nothing. The Dervishes appeared to have gone right away.

Chorker remained in his self-sought imprisonment, and at intervals endeavoured to attract attention by tapping the bottom of the stone trap or shouting. But his voice gave out ere the day was over.

The consultations of Jim with Morse and others, frequent, and conducted in whispers, showed that anxious thoughts were in their minds. Romeo saw it, and he became very restless. Towards night he said to his father, as they were putting away the muddles of the day in the kitchen:

"Now, s'pose you not see me till de mornin', am dere any 'casion for you to make a bobbery 'bout it?"

"What dat?" demanded Macbeth, looking up sharply from his seat by a table where he was counting the knives.

The question was repeated.

"Where am de reason for you to be away?" asked Hamlet.

"Dat not de p'int," answered Romeo; "it come to dis—I'm goin'. Dat 'nuff. You say nuffin' 'bout it till you see my ghose."

They stared at him with a startled expression on their ebony faces.

"You' ghose!" echoed his grandfather.

"Dat 'bout it," said Romeo, easily; "my ghose, which, ob course, pay you a visit if dis chile come to a timely grave. Me goin' out for Marse Gordon, and you keep mum on it, bof ob you."

They promised, of course. If it was Jim's business Romeo was going on, there was an end of it. But they quaked as they thought of his coming to an untimely end and afterwards haunting them.

"S'pose you killed, now," said Macbeth, "where de reason for you to come worryin' us poor ole folk? Am you not done 'nuff in dat way while you 'bout dis sublunetic worl' in de flesh?"

"Me not 'sponsible for what my ghose do," said Romeo; "dat am 'tiredly him own business."

Having thus divested himself of all responsibility in connection with the antics his ghost might choose to play, he left them to their reflections.

They were far from being comforting.

"S'pose dat boy get kill, now," said Macbeth, "we in for sumfin', sure."

"You am," said Hamlet, curtly. "What you expect, eider? You was allus on a hard tack wif dat boy."

"Me spen' more ob my time in protecking him from you violets," asserted Macbeth; "it a good job him poor moder not alibe."

"She am alibe—far as me know," said Hamlet.

"What!" exclaimed Macbeth, "you tell me twenty year ago dat she dead."

"Dis chile ran away from her," rejoined Hamlet.

Macbeth surveyed him for a time with mixed feelings,

but his face relaxed into a smile, and there was an entirely hypocritical look in it.

"Cur'us, now, dat," he said, "when you was a baby me run away from *you* moder."

"Say dat 'gain!" cried Hamlet.

Macbeth repeated his miserable confession.

"You ole skunk," said Hamlet, "to go leabing *my* moder. A nice t'ing if bof turned up one day. Dere be a bit of bobbery on dat occashun."

This alarming idea set them both thinking, and in the weighty thoughts that came to their minds they found much matter to keep them in a speculative mood for the next half-hour.

Meanwhile, Romeo, with a fixed idea in his head, went out to the hall and found preparations going on for refixing the barricade that had been put up the night before.

He hovered about until he got a chance of slipping out unobserved. Turning sharp round to the left he lay down close against the high walls of the building and waited for darkness to come.

It was not long in descending, and as there was no moon the square was wrapped in gloom. Crawling on his stomach, he proceeded to work his way round it.

He knew that sharp eyes would be on the look-out for anything moving, and he was not exactly overwhelmed with astonishment when he heard a murmur of voices from behind the now raised bronze gates. He had sharp ears, and he was sure he caught the words, "A shot will do no great harm. It is a living creature," and his heart throbbed against his side like the pumping-gear of a stationary engine.

"Dey boun' to shoot," he muttered, "and if de bullet lodge in my carcass dere an end to a journey. So dere must be if dey know who it am."

He hardly knew what to do, but he lay still with his eyes closed, thinking over what course to adopt. While he meditated the shot was fired.

The missile in the weapon was not of lead, for they were short of the valuable metal. It was either a piece of bronze or iron. It struck the stone wall just above Romeo's head, and peppered him with fragments of masonry.

But he lay quite still, and presently heard somebody say, "As I told you. It is nothing but a deep shadow."

He thought it prudent to lie close for a while, and when he did stir, to make his progression a matter of inches.

Happily, no further notice was taken of him, and when he felt safer he got upon his feet and stole down to the bottom of the square, still unperceived by the watchers above.

Thence he made his way to the gap made in the wall by Morse's recent exploit, and passed through it.

Romeo was bent on endeavouring to discover the whereabouts of the Dervishes, and he was satisfied he could do so if they were still in the neighbourhood.

In many things Romeo was far from brilliant, but he had a lot of the savage instinct in him. But perhaps it ought hardly to be called savage, for it was only that natural gift which all men who dwell in wild, uncultivated countries possess in a varied degree.

He had the gift of caution, the power of stealthy, silent movement, and eyes that might have been useful to a nocturnal animal. He could see almost as well in the gloom of night as some people can when the sun is shining. Anyway, he, with the aid of deduction, did not make a mistake about the nature of objects that were pretty near him.

With many others, he thought the Dervishes were in the wood, and he was creeping up that way, with his eyes and ears intent, when a slight noise from the rear checked him.

He lay down at full length and listened.

Presently he heard it again, and recognised its nature. It was iron lightly striking against stone.

To hear it for the third time, as he did anon, was to locate it. The sound came from the direction of the city walls on the left, as he sat facing that way. And it was by the wall that was a blank level stone right up to the top, blank to those outside, although inside it had a broad ledge, and in many places steps leading up thereto.

"Now, who am 'bout dat way?" muttered Romeo.

Instead of speculating according to his wont, he wisely crept down, bearing to the left, and finally reaching the ground which he and others had trodden when they retreated from the beach on which the "Cagliula" lay.

More than once on the way he heard that clinking of steel or iron against stone, and as it was soft it sounded to him as if something was cautiously tapping the wall.

It was rarely that he was so clear in his judgments, for he was absolutely correct.

Stealing about in the darkness were two Dervishes, who kept close to the wall, and tapped it near the base with the hilt of a sword.

Romeo, slipping quietly down the slope, came near enough to see what they were doing.

Before they travelled far under his eye the tapping seemed to have brought forth fruit.

The men stopped and exchanged a few words.

What they were Romeo could not say, but the tone of satisfaction was unmistakable.

But why they should give it vent he could not tell.

From the reader we need not keep it as a secret.

They had found a weak place in the wall.

CHAPTER CCLIII.

THE NEW CAMP OF THE DERVISHES.



ROMEO had discovered something, but he knew not what. His object in coming out was to ascertain if the Dervishes were still in the neighbourhood, and if so, where?

That was something he had yet to perform.

He lay close with his eyes upon the pair, and waited until they had conferred for a minute in a whisper, and then as they stole softly away in the direction of the other wood that fringed the cliff by the sea where the "Cagliula" used to lie, he cautiously followed them.

Without revealing his presence he succeeded in ascertaining that the whole body of the remaining foe had pitched their tents just within its precincts, so as to be out of sight. There was nothing more to be discovered by him, and with all speed he returned to the square in Gordontown, where he lay down by the fountain and took a few hours of refreshing sleep.

In the morning he was aroused by the clanging made by the bronze gate as it was shifted from its position and lowered to the stone flooring of the Hall of Justice.

Then, having taken a few moments to collect his thoughts, he cautiously stood up and showed his sable countenance to the boys, who were all awake and coming out for a little fresh air.

Hillyard and Dawson, who were on guard, walked down to the spot where Romeo had lain close while being fired at, to see what it was that had attracted the attention of the watchers, and they were the first to see him.

"Romeo," cried Hillyard, in surprise, "how the deuce came you here?"

"Been shut out," replied Romeo, "and a nice ting dat you got no more senses dan to go a-blazin' away at you bes' fren'."

"Was it you skulking against the wall?" asked Dawson.

"It were."

"Then why on earth couldn't you say so?"

Romeo had no answer ready. It was not his intention to report on his night's work save at headquarters, so he merely grinned and went on to where Jim was standing taking a survey of the country within the ken of his binoculars.

"Romeo," said Jim, sternly, "I suppose you know it is against orders for anyone to be abroad after dark?"

"Marse Jim," replied Romeo, "dere am 'spedients in time ob warfar when it am right to forget de orders. Me been out on a scouterin' expedition."

"Oh!" said Jim, softening; "and what is the result?"

"Fust ob all," rejoined Romeo, "me see two ob de Devishishes"—it was as near as he could get to the right word—"kind ob sneaking 'bout de walls to fine a way in. But dey gib up de job and go back to dere tents, where dis chile foller dem. Dey got settle down up yonder."

He pointed in the direction of the hidden camp, and Jim nodded in indication that he had suspected they were not far away.

"There were two of them down by the wall?" he said.

"Dat de number ob dem, Marse Jim."

"Did you make out who they were?"

"It 'bout as much as me see dem at all."

"I suppose so. Well, Romeo, you have done so well that I cannot reproach you for disobedience. On the contrary, it will be remembered as something to your credit."

"Dat all me want," said Romeo, as he went off in the direction of his quarters, with a face that shone like polished jet.

His communication was very important, and an animated discussion, in which many of the boys and men joined, ensued.

The general opinion was that the Dervishes were, as Romeo surmised, merely looking for a spot that could be scaled, but there were not wanting others who thought differently.

Morse thought so, as did Martin and Daw. Jim maintained the position of a listener for a time.

"It isn't reasonable," said Morse, "that they should come down in the dark to see what could be better observed, even from the wood, in the daylight. They have some other object in view."

But what it was remained to be discovered.

"One thing is certain," said Ganthony: "they have not the means of scaling the walls, and it may be that they came to see if any portion of the stonework had broken away so as to given them a foothold. Those fellows can climb like cats."

"They would have to climb like snails to gain the top of any portion of the wall," said Jim; "it is perfectly upright everywhere, and whatever unevenness there may be is not sufficient to give a foothold to a rat."

They could not see the wood from where they were, and none of the houses they had visited had the means of getting upon the roof. It seemed to be

essential that another mode of watching must be maintained during the night hours.

"We must have sentries along the wall," said Jim, "on that side of the city."

"I think," suggested Daw, "that it is their intention, if they try it at all, to endeavour to get in at night."

"It is at night," answered Jim, "that the sentries will be posted."

"Why not by day?" asked Morse.

"Do you think it necessary?"

"I do, Jim. As we have an hour before the niggers will be ready with the grub, I will have a run round."

"I'll come with you," said Terry.

There was no apparent danger, but they took their rifles and started. The way round to that portion of the walls they were going to inspect was by the back of the Hall of Justice and up through a maze of narrow streets which seemed to have been originally the poorer quarter of the town.

The ascent was made by a flight of stone steps, one of many along the route, built against the side of the wall. On the summit there was a parapet four feet high, and the whole had a very massive appearance.

The lookout was grand, and they could see right away to the wood where the tents of the Dervishes were, and to the right and left. The beauty of early summer was on the land.

No sign of human life was to be seen, and they moved easily along, talking softly together. There was no known reason for caution, but it had become a habit with the boys to speak quietly.

"I was thinking this morning," said Terry, "how circumstances make a fellow."

Morse looked at him inquiringly. Terry's remark was apropos of nothing they had previously said.

"What I mean is this," continued Terry: "say that we, any of us, had known of the danger of the life we lead here, should we have come to the island?"

"Well, no," said Morse, thoughtfully, "for although we may not be cowards, we are not the fools to run into danger for the love of it alone."

"Just my idea," responded Terry; "and then, when we first began to realise that danger was coming, the majority of us felt a little of that emotion known as fear, or something akin to it."

"Naturally. The bravest man in the world, when he enters his first battle-ground, knows what it is, and is not ashamed to admit it."

"But as trouble after trouble, peril after peril, came upon us, we gradually rose to meet them, became educated to danger, in fact."

"You have hit the nail on the head, Terry. The coolness of the old warrior is a matter of being educated to the steeling of his nerves."

"And that is what we have done?"

"Precisely."

"Personally," said Terry, "if I had been told two years ago that we could have risen to meet emergencies as we have done, I should have laughed at the notion."

"The island school," said Morse, "has given us an education in the truest sense of the word. Book-learning is very desirable, but it isn't everything."

"See how we have been educated to use our wits," said Terry, with quiet enthusiasm. "Eye and hand are both surer than those ninety-nine per cent. of the boys at home can boast of. Then our health is, if I may so term it, tremendous. I feel as if every fibre of my body was made of fine wire."

"Just so," said Morse.

He was thoughtfully passing his hand along the stone parapet. As he assented to Terry's views on their physical condition, he stopped short.

"Do you know, old fellow," he said, "that I think this wall is a bit of a fraud?"

CHAPTER CCLIV.

THE WORK OF A NIGHT.—IN A STATE OF SIEGE.



TERRY stopped short and regarded Morse with the utmost amazement.

"The wall a fraud?" he exclaimed.

"It is not solid throughout," said Morse.

"You guess that much?" suggested Terry.

"I suggest it on good grounds," asserted Morse.

"As we have strolled along, I noticed that although we were walking quietly the sound of our footsteps varies. Either the wall is in places a shell, or it has hidden recesses in it."

"I never saw such a fellow as you are, Morse! I noticed no difference."

"My studying, as I do, very closely, and the resulting habit of calculating everything to a nicety, has developed in me a very sensitive condition of nerve."

"That I can understand."

"Therefore I have fallen into the almost mechanical way of estimating the relative value of everything. Now listen. I tap the stone we are walking on. How does it sound?"

"Solid as a rock."

Morse walked on a few paces, and Terry followed. Then the former tapped the wall again.

"How does that strike you?" he asked.

"By George!" said Terry, "there *is* a difference,

but not one fellow in a hundred would notice it unless it was named to him."

"It suffices in this case," said Morse, serenely, "that the one fellow has observed it. But of what consequence it may be to us I cannot tell."

"I don't see that it can signify in the least," remarked Terry.

"Probably you are right. I hope not."

They moved on towards the lower end of the city. As the wall was built on a level, it naturally followed that at intervals there were a number of steps to meet the sloping of the vast arch on which the place was built.

It was while they were descending one of these flights that Morse suddenly grasped Terry by the arm and pushed him aside.

"Don't speak," he whispered.

Terry did not, but he looked all sorts of questions. Morse doffed his cap, and, lying down at full length, crept up to the edge of the wall on the city side where there was no parapet.

With the utmost caution he peered over, just for a moment, and then slipped back again.

Rising, he motioned for Terry to turn back, and set the example by hastening along, walking with the lightest of footsteps.

Not a word was said until they had reached the steps by which they ascended, and Terry could hold out no longer.

"For goodness' sake, Morse," he pleaded, "tell me what is the matter now."

"The Dervishes have made a hole through the base of the wall," replied Morse, "where one of the hollow places are, I presume. They are creeping through, one by one."

"Save us, but that is bad!"

They were still hurrying on towards their friends. Morse could speak freely now.

"About two-thirds were through when I peeped over. It was the glimpse I caught of a turban that led me to know that somebody was in the city. Had I not seen it, we should have gone on and been bowled out."

"They could have cut us off from our chums!" exclaimed Terry, breathlessly.

"Certainly. But that is not what concerns me so much. An attack upon the hall is imminent. We have not a moment to spare."

"They have not so far to travel as we have," muttered Terry.

"But all the beggars were not through," said Morse, hopefully. "How are you off for wind?"

"Any amount of lung power," replied Terry. "Never short of it now."

They broke into a run and soon appeared before the hall, where, in a state of false security, the boys

and men were scattered about, some down by the fountain with buckets performing their ablutions.

Jim was midway, talking to Rainstone.

A word from Morse and he was by his side.

"All in, Jim, for the life of us!" said Morse. "The enemy are in the city!"

"Let everything be done quietly," said Jim, promptly rising to the position, although he was not yet fully acquainted with the particular nature of the peril. "Dibble, get those fellows in. Tell them to come as they are, and be as quick as they can. No noise. Martin!"

"Here, sir," said the blacksmith, who was standing in the porch of the hall, looking down wonderingly on the signs of sudden commotion.

"We must close up at once," said Jim. "All hands to barricade!"

The boys and men came tearing up from the fountain, some carrying their upper clothing, which they had removed for cleansing purposes.

Three minutes sufficed for all to be within the shelter of the hall. Two minutes more, and the bronze gate was up and being fixed in its place with wooden shoring material.

Not a word was said during this proceeding, but the excitement was naturally intense.

Just at that moment Romeo appeared.

"Golly pumpkins!" he exclaimed, "what am I doing ob dis confusaleem?"

"Come here," said Morse.

Romeo, with his eyes out of his head, advanced. He thought that he had done something criminal without knowing it, the face of Morse was so stern.

"What were those two men doing by the wall last night?" said Morse.

"Dey was jes' tapping it," replied Romeo.

"Why did you not say so before?" said Morse.

"Me not tink ob it."

"It was an oversight. The next time you go scouting, take a mental note of everything. I am not reproaching you, but I wish to impress upon you the full duty of the work."

"Jim," he added, turning to his chum, "the Dervishes found out last night what I discovered this morning. In places the wall is a shell, and they have succeeded in breaking their way through."

There was a movement among the startled listeners, but they all kept silent, waiting for the rest.

Morse told them in a terse fashion how he had detected the presence of the Dervishes within the walls, and it is needless to describe the absorbing interest his short narrative created.

"About what time were you back in the city?" inquired Morse of Romeo, who now felt that as scout he had his shortcomings.

"Shortly after midnight," he answered.

"They must have come down in a body," said Morse, "and worked like niggers, or, rather, as niggers *don't* always work, to get through the wall. I have no means of knowing what tools they had, but I reckon they must have picked out the mortar and cement with their swords, and removed the stones one by one. Anyhow, the trick is done."

There was no doubt of that, and the fact was that the Hall of Justice would soon be besieged.

But how would the enemy act? Would a bold attack be decided on, or would the starving-out tactics be adopted?

That was a matter which could not be decided on off-hand, for up to the end of the narration, and during the carrying-out of other means for defence, the square remained deserted.

CHAPTER COLV.

THE ATTACK ON THE HALL.

FORGETFULNESS is common to us all, especially when some matter of ultra importance is in our minds. Then minor things have to go the wall. It is not wonderful, then, that Chorker should be forgotten, not only by Romeo, but by all others in the Hall of Justice. Neither Jim nor Morse retired to their private room during the morning.

It was a period of great anxiety, not lessened by the non-appearance of the foe.

The square remained untenanted, and the only sounds that were heard came from the fowls and the calf, the former cackling as they wondered why Romeo did not appear with the accustomed morning meal, and the latter also troubled by the enforced neglect of its gastronomical arrangements.

Otherwise, the square was as still as it had been through the long centuries of its desolation.

Doubt is the most trying of the emotions. When one knows the exact nature of a sorrow or an ill, then one braces up to meet whichever it may be, but the uncertainty of what is coming is a sore tax indeed.

Now that the arms were ready, and the powder to hand, there was little to do. One thing only was lacking. They had no cartridges for the Winchester repeaters; the machine for making them had been mislaid. It was serious, but Jim and Morse had ordinary rifles to use.

An attempt to kill the time with such innocent games as the boys were wont to indulge in, was a



conspicuous failure. Nor was an effort to make things bearable by story-telling a success.

It was not a question of whether the Dervishes had departed or not. They were there in the city, and they had not come in sport merely to go away again. That was a dead-sure thing.

Once there was an alarm from Felton, who announced that somebody was moving about in the lower part of the square. But it turned out to be only a black bird of the crow species that had settled down, and presently rising on the wing, floated up over the hall.

"That's a carrion crow," said Dawson, who was well up in all matters appertaining to ordinary birds and beasts.

"Rather ominous, isn't it?" suggested Trimmer.

"Nothing is really ominous," said Jim. "The crow would have been there without the Dervishes."

The hours passed away. Noon arrived, and ushered in the afternoon. By that time it was assumed that a night attack was meditated.

But ere another hour was gone, the report of a rifle was heard, and the bullet struck the bronze gate, and some fragments of lead splashed through, striking Changeling in the cheek.

He was about to put his eye to the openwork. Had he done so the moment before, he would have been partly blinded.

"All right," said he; "I'll bear that kind attention in mind."

The fragments of lead had not gone in deep, and Martin, with the blade of his pocket-knife, picked them out. Changeling wiped the blood away, and asked if he might have a smoke.

"Of course," said Jim.

"When you've got a smart on," said Changeling to the boys, "there is nothing like 'bacca."

He rubbed a little of the weed into his wounds, and lighting his pipe, sat down by the wall out of the line of fire.

Jim commanded all but those who were on duty at the gate, to take the same precaution.

The order of night watching, as to numbers and time of changing, was preserved. The only difference was, that either he or Morse or Martin was now always in command.

After the first shot there was a spell of quietude, but firing was eventually repeated at intervals during the afternoon.

"I can guess what that means," said Dibble, suddenly, "they are firing that to keep us in here. Most of the blackguards are prowling about the town to see if any of us are abroad."

"You seldom make a guess, Dibble," said Terry, "but when you do, it ought to be put on record."

"I have no doubt," said Jim, "that Dibble is right.

Those shots are feelers. They suspect we are in here, and wish to make sure. As for searching the town, I think it highly probable they have devoted the morning to that purpose."

"Now you must feel as proud as Jim Crow going to a ball," whispered Terry.

"Go to Putney on a pig," growled Dibble.

"I would go—on anything—if I could," sighed Terry.

As the night drew near, the necessity of watching with the utmost vigilance was apparent.

Two-thirds of the defenders were ordered out of the hall to the back rooms, but to be ready to come forward the moment they were required. Food was partaken of, by their going in turns in small batches to the kitchen.

"If you speak at all," said Jim, "let it be in whispers."

The evening watch was his, and it extended into the first two hours of the night. After a short sleep, Morse joined him, and together they watched the light of day fade out and the darkness settle down. In the hall there was almost absolute stillness.

The members of the guard were desired now to keep out of immediate peril by taking up a position in line with the barricade and close to the wall as before. Jim lay at full length on one side of the gate with his ears close to the lower openwork, listening for the enemy.

He knew how stealthy the Dervishes could be, but he was far from being prepared for their coming up without the slightest sound, as they eventually did.

There was a little light mingled with the gloom, of course, for outside the stars were shining; but in the hall it was very dark.

Nevertheless, one little light sufficed for Jim's watchful eyes, and those of two or three more to see the barrel of a rifle come slowly through the open bronze-work for a foot or more.

Then was exemplified the condition by experience and training of nerve, the boys had been brought to.

They neither spoke nor stirred, but waited for a word from their leader.

Jim drew back, and lay quite still, with his face pressing upon the stone flooring.

He guessed what was about to happen.

A rifle was to be fired, and by its flash the Dervishes, who had drawn up and were, possibly, posted outside handy for the purpose, would be able to see if the hall were occupied or not.

But it was empty of all save the guard, who were lying close to the wall, out of sight, and from the outside it would appear to be deserted.

There were a few moments of suspense, and then the report of the weapon sounded with terrible loud-

ness to the ear. The flash of the powder lighted up the place for an instant, and then came the darkness again.

Once more was the admirable training of the boys and men illustrated by the party in the rear making no movement whatever.

But as soon as the report died away Jim was on the alert.

He whispered to Morse, on his left, who passed the softly-uttered command to the next, and so on to all the guard.

It was twelve strong, and with a stealthiness that would have done credit to their foes, they all crept forward in the wake of Jim, who had moved on to the centre of the barricade.

Now he could see with sufficient distinctness the silent gathering of a body of the Dervishes, who were coming up the steps, it might be to force the barricade.

Jim, as a return move, gently thrust out the barrel of his rifle, not more than an inch or so beyond the gate, lest it should be seen.

Again was his example followed, with bated breath, and hearts that beat tumultuously.

"Now!" he said, suddenly.

The whole twelve rifles went off almost as one, and a yell of surprise and wrath arose from the gathering outside.

It was immediately followed by the thud of the falling dead and the groans of the wounded.

"Back!" said Jim, and once more they slipped aside out of the line of fire.

But there was hardly any further danger just then, for, having emptied, in a reckless way, some of their rifles, the Dervishes retreated, dragging their dead and wounded with them.

"Don't waste your powder on chance firing," said Morse, as two or three youngsters reloaded quickly, as if to let fly at the retreating foe. "We shall have a quiet night after this."

"Can't we give them a parting cheer?" asked Terry.

"Shout away," said the elated Jim.

They shouted in triumph and derision in the fullness of their hearts, and the sound was taken up by their comrades in the rear.

The Dervishes answered with a fierce yelling, and after that gave no further indication of their position. They melted away as they came, like the dark shadows of the night.



CHAPTER CCLVI.

THREE DAYS' SIEGE.—THIRST AS AN ASSISTANT TO THE ENEMY.



WHATEVER might have been the extent of the enemy's loss, they effectually concealed it by taking away the fallen. But, as Morse had intimated, they came no more that night.

Daylight returned, showing all still and empty in the square, save as regards the confined fowls and the calf, which were not disposed to endure hard times without remonstrance. But no help could be given them.

"Dey better amuse demselves, dem chicks," said Romeo, "by laying a few extra eggs. Up to de present dem 'Norcas, like de natif pussons, mōre reclined to laziness dan anyting else."

"What de good ob dem layin' dem," groaned Macbeth, as he shuffled round the kitchen, "when you nebber hab de chance to eat dem?"

"You was a born ole groaner," returned Romeo, indignantly. "If me know how you was going to grow up, blow me if I ebber took you on for a grandfader."

This curious declaration raised a laugh from some of the boys, who had come into the kitchen for a drink of water.

The air of the hall was rather close, and the muggy warmth was conducive to thirst.

To Macbeth Romeo's words opened up quite a mine of speculation.

"If you not hab me for a gran'fader," he said, "who you hab den?"

"Dat," replied Romeo, calmly, "am my special bisness, and not a ginerall fambly marrer."

Suddenly a thought of Chorker in confinement flashed upon him, and he hurried out to release that worthy on certain conditions he had framed in his mind.

But as he was never able to enforce them we need not put his conceptions on record.

Jim was lying asleep when Romeo quietly entered the chamber. No other boy or man was there.

He stole over to the trap, drew out the knife, and pulled aside the stone:

"Chorker," he said, in a whisper, "you come out for a libin' skunk, an' not make de lease noise, for Marse Jim am in depose after a rankshous night."

But there was no response.

Chorker was not on the stairs, or, indeed, as far as Romeo could see, anywhere handy.

"Now where dat cuss?" muttered Romeo; "he allus doin' ob sumfin' to 'noy people. Shouldn't be 'sprised now, if, out ob spite, he been an' fallen all de way down dem stairs jess to gib someborry de trouble ob nussin' him."

He thrust his head into the opening, and in a thrilling whisper repeated the name of the missing one:

"Chorker! Chorker!"

Still there was no response.

"Whar you manners, you ole fool?" demanded Romeo, "keepin' dis chile here all day axing after you! For de larse time: am you comin' up?"

Apparently Chorker was not, for there was no sound or movement below.

"Den stop dere!" muttered Romeo.

He closed the trap, but did not insert the knife again. He closed the blade, and softly inserted it into Jim's belt without disturbing him.

On reflection, Romeo decided not to say anything about Chorker. In a measure it would be his fault if that dismal old man had come to an untimely end, and with all his dislike for him Romeo did not want the burden of his death to be thrust upon his shoulders.

"If," he murmured, as he slowly retreated from the room, "he is in de mind to come up, dere am de trap as good as open for him. If he was a King ob de Rushers he not expeck more dan dat. Ob course, if he oblurate, an' make up him mind to stay dere, dat am him lookout. No morfal man' libin' am 'sponsibel for him den."

Having eased his conscience by this sophistical reasoning, he went about his duties, and Chorker remained a forgotten quantity among all the rest.

And no wonder.

The day passed, and there was no return of the foe. Then, when too late, it was discovered that the boys had been too free with the water, and there was scarcely a drop left.

It was thought of when somebody at a late hour suggested tea, and Romeo said there was nothing to make it with.

The fact was reported to Jim, who saw that a terrible oversight had placed them in a dangerous position.

"I ought to have remembered that a siege was possible, and doled it out," he said to Morse.

"One cannot think of everything," was the sensible reply. "It is more the fault of myself and others than yours."

"Could we not risk a trip to the fountain?" mused Jim. "Under the cover of darkness it might be done."

"If the Dervishes are in ambush handy," said Morse, "as I believe they are, it would be madness to risk it. We should have no time to refix the barricade, and it would be impossible to stand against their wild rush."

Just about one gallon of water remained. This Jim took possession of, and bottled off as if it had been wine. Of the latter named they had a store, but it was not in the hall. It had been put away in one of the houses in the square hidden, it may be said, to be used only in case of sickness. In the Hall of Justice there was no place where it could be kept secure.

Good fellows as the men were, it would not have been wise to put temptation in their way. Smith and Cobbles, the seamen, for instance, were very trustworthy men, but they had the sailor's weakness for "a drop," as Johnny Daw told Jim, and all intoxicants were better out of their reach.

So all that remained to assuage the thirst of nearly seventy people was one gallon of water. None was served out that night, and those whom duty kept awake discovered that thirst came to them with especial virulence, now that it could not be assuaged. But they bore their suffering uncomplainingly.

There was no movement on the part of the enemy, and another day of stillness without was entered upon.

Thirst was now general, and a small drop of water, about a tablespoonful, was served out as a last general drink. It was just enough to enable them to swallow their food in comfort.

"Perhaps the real attack will come to-day," said Jim, hopefully, "and then it will be all right with us."

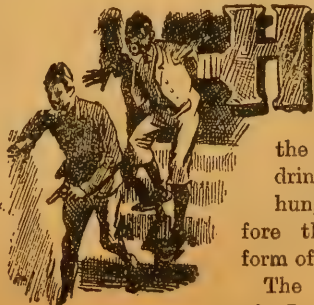
"Or all wrong," said Martin.

"Ay, or all wrong," assented Jim. "We shall know the best or worst, anyway."

But the day passed, and the foe made no sign.

CHAPTER CCLVII.

A SORTIE PROPOSED.—IN QUEST OF WATER IN THE VAULT.



He who is assailed by thirst is, as a rule, unable to eat. Therefore does he suffer in a double sense. On the other hand, one can drink no matter how hungry we may be. Therefore thirst is the greater form of suffering.

The occupants of the Hall of Justice soon found it getting intolerable. With the exception of the sea-

man Smith, who had once been five days at sea in a boat without water, none there had known it in a serious degree.

Ordinary thirst all were of course familiar with, but the parched throat, mouth, tongue, and lips, and the other attendant sensations, they were strangers to.

And all through the hot day they could see the fountain, with cool water playing, and could overhear the gentle splashing as the surplusage fell into the stone drain outside. It was maddening.

"I vote," said Terry, "that we make a sortie, and take our chance of a fight."

"Can't be thought of," said Jim, laconically; "unless you are determined to commit suicide. Ask Morse."

"But we cannot go on for ever like this," urged several, in a chorus of dry, cracked voices.

"Morse has an idea," remarked Jim, pointing to his chum, who was sitting thoughtfully by the barricade.

The thoughtful look upon his face was familiar to them all, and, as something invariably came out of his meditations, they waited in silence for Morse to speak.

Presently he raised his eyes and looked at the group of faces near him. He smiled faintly.

"I was not aware that you were watching me," he said. "Jim, there is one hope of finding water without going outside. We must get at the leading pipe of the fountain."

"And where do you think that may be?"

"In the vault, Jim."

The suggestion was seen to be a reasonable one. Of course the pipe was there, and the wonder was, as it always is when an easy solution is found of an apparently difficult problem, that nobody had thought of it before.

"I will go in search of it," said Morse. "I shall only require Romeo with a lantern."

"By the way," exclaimed Jim, "Chorker was down there."

"Dat so, Marse Jim," said Romeo, as if he now remembered it for the first time.

"You said you would let him out, Romeo."

Romeo assumed a meditating air, as one who is not quite sure of a matter he is reminded of.

"Now dat me defect," he said, "dere am a possibler dat me make a suggesten to dat defect."

"Strange that we have heard nothing of him these two days."

"Mebbe he overslep hisself," hinted Romeo.

"Come along," said Morse; "let us find him and the means of getting water, too."

Romeo speedily obtained a lantern, and they departed to the vault.

Alone Romeo would not have entered there, for he

verily believed that Chorker was no more. If he had been wicked enough to bet on such a subject, he would have laid all he had on finding the mangled remains of the old man at the bottom of the steps.

"You go firse, Marse Morse," he said, as they opened the trap. "It much berrer to hab de light behine you."

This was not exactly correct, but Romeo's idea was to leave to Morse the uncanny task of finding the body.

Morse may have hit upon the idea in the nigger's head, for he smiled, and, having no fears in the matter, quietly led the way.

But Chorker was not at the bottom of the steps, nor did he respond to his name when called. What had become of him was for the time a mystery.

But he was only one man, and the sufferings of many had to be looked to. So Morse, having as far as he was able located the position of the fountain overhead, walked slowly in that direction, surveying the ground as he passed over it.

It was an extremely difficult thing to keep exactly in the right line, and when he considered he had passed the spot he stopped, and began to walk in a circle.

"Keep that lantern steady," he said, for Romeo, fearing the coming of Chorker's ghost to reproach him with his neglect, was allowing his eyes to roam fearfully around, to the detriment of the light he carried.

Thrice had Morse made a circle, diminishing it in size each time, when he suddenly came upon what he sought. Straight from the ground, and losing itself in the gloom overhead, was a rather slim bronze pipe, seemingly without a single joint. The position and the nature of the find left no doubt as to its nature.

Morse drew out a file from his pocket and began to work upon it.

Romeo watched him with his eager eyes, forgetting for the while his fears of the coming of Chorker's ghost.

In ten minutes water appeared, slowly trickling down the file.

One minute more, and Morse stopped work, and a jet of the precious liquid spurted out.

"Drink, Romeo," he said.

"After you, Marse Morse," replied Romeo. "De imperence ob drinking firse 'bout choke me."

So Morse, unwilling to bring so precious a life to a sudden end, drank, and only those who know what real thirst is, can realise the ecstasy of that moment. Then Romeo had his fill, and it was a long time before he stopped.

"Dat beat de bess wine eber brewed," he said.

Morse did not stay to explain to him that wine was not brewed, but led the way back, and as they reached

the steps, he fairly bounded up them in the joy he felt as the bearer of good news.

They were waiting for him in the room above, so many eager friends, and when the good tidings became known, a cheer burst from every lip.

It lacked power, for dry throats are not the mediums for cheering, but the intensity of it showed the depth and breadth of the feeling of relief.

"Get all the things you can find that will serve to carry up the water," said Morse, "and also bring along a cork or two. I shall want one about the size of a small bung. Give me the light, and fetch along others. Don't all come down. Half a dozen of you will do."

If the Dervishes were within hearing, they must have wondered when the cheering was taken up in the hall where the remainder of the cooped-up defenders were.

Morse slipped down again, found the pipe once more, and proceeded to file it all round with the object of eventually cutting it in two.

Just before he finished the task, down came a troop of eager water-seekers carrying jugs, cans, and even basins of various sizes.

Macbeth and Hamlet were there, both in a state of thirst that was bordering on the maddening. The elder of the two niggers brought with him the biggest jug in the place, and there was little doubt he had it in his mind to have a long and steady drink.

Presently Morse bade them all stand ready.

"The water," he said, "will probably shoot up high overhead. I will force the pipe over a bit. Then catch it as it falls."

It was done. The pipe having been carefully filed through, was forced apart, and the fountain above ceased to play. This was a matter of more importance to our friends than they thought of at the time. But the present moment was all they thought of; and as the water spouted up, falling in a curve about ten feet away, there was a rush to catch it.

Macbeth caught it first upon his aged head, and a vigorous drenching was the result. Blinded and confused, he staggered out of the way.

"Dat de boy Romeo's doin', I be bound!" he gasped, as he wiped the moisture from his eyes.

Romeo, who was standing near, laughed at the confusion of his grandfather, and suggested to him, "Dat he 'bout got him full share ob de water, and had berrer git long upstairs agen."

If the thirsty water-carriers first assuaged their own thirst, it was but human. That done, they hastened up with a supply for their comrades above.

Macbeth was the last to fill his jug, and that done, Morse forced a big cork into the pipe, and so stopped the overflow. It was necessary to do so to save the vault from being flooded.

It was astonishing to see the change in the young defenders of the Hall of Justice. With their thirst gone, they were hopeful and light-hearted again.

"We shall come out of this business all right," said Terry to Dibble.

"I always thought so," was the reply; not exactly the truth.

But Dibble thought so at the moment, and it was only a very little fib after all.

CHAPTER CCLVIII.

THE DERVISHES' THIRST.—A BREAKING OUT IN ANOTHER DIRECTION.



KA WALLAH and his men were camped in the lower part of Gordontown, now waiting, as has been suggested, for the besieged to yield for want of food and water.

Of the latter there was now a plentiful supply, and provisions were in store for fully two weeks. But even this meant that economy must be exercised, and a rigid watch kept upon those with big appetites.

There were, in that respect, no failures in the place. All were hearty and strong, and Jim now began to think that in the matter of food no mistake must be made, as there had been in the case of water.

It was terrible to think that they might possibly be cooped up there for an indefinite time, with not a shadow of visible chance of outside aid.

But that was the contingency they had to arrange for. Only at the last moment must a sortie be thought of.

But there was one thing that he was not aware of, which was in his favour. The Dervishes in their turn had lost their supply of water.

When camped on the hill, they obtained it from a spring in the wood. This for some unaccountable reason had suddenly dried up, and only the night before they had been driven up to the fountain to obtain a supply.

They had but three goat-skins—bottles, they are called in the East—to keep full as a store, and these they had filled. During the day they emptied them, and when at night they again stole up in detachments to assuage their thirst, the first party of ten under their leader found the fountain was no more.

Such water as there was in the basin had been "de-filed by the unbeliever." In other words, the last

time the boys washed there, Dibble dropped a cake of soap into it, and it was undrinkable.

The Dervishes were unacquainted with soap. It was not in their line as a domestic article of use. The flavour of the alkali they conceived to be that of poison, and they would not touch it.

Indeed, if they had they would have suffered afterwards, for soap is for outward application only.

So they were without water, and they wondered what they had done, that Allah should so suddenly stop the supply.

The next day was spent in drowsily tom-toming on the drum and praying for the fountain to be renewed. But the next night it was still silent, and then they did what sensible men would have done twenty hours before, they sought water in the country around.

Parties were sent out with instructions to limit the area of their explorations, and, unaccustomed to woods and a country of that description, they failed to find what they looked for. So they returned and reported that the whole land was dry.

For the third time, under the cover of darkness, they crept up to the fountain, with no better result.

Another day of tom-toming brought them no relief, and although hardened to days without drink in their desert life at home, the inevitable pangs got hold of them at last.

And all this time the boys waited wonderingly in their place of confinement, to be at last convinced that Oka Wallah was determined to starve them out.

It was after all these failures to find water that Fornshaw, the renegade, who had looked grimly on at the sufferings of the men around him, sought Oka Wallah in his tent.

He found the old man in a dejected frame of mind, but still dogged and determined.

"Behold! oh, Oka Wallah," he said, "I have had a dream."

The chief sat with his eyes resting on the face of the other, and signified with a motion of his hand that he heard him.

It is unwise, as the Dervish knew, to exercise the voice when troubled with acute thirst.

"And it came to me in this dream," said Fornshaw, "that we have incurred the anger of Allah by coming here."

"What!" screeched Oka Wallah, "shall it be a sin to slay the unbeliever?"

"It may be," said Fornshaw, "that a worse fate is in store for our enemies."

"My enemies," muttered Oka Wallah, "not yours."

"Am I not of the faithful?" asked Fornshaw.

"No!" was the hissing reply; "even to-day I marked your face as we uttered the prayer for water. Your lip was curled in mockery at us. You are not of my people, but of *them*!"

And Oka Wallah swept his arm round, indicating that he meant the party in the Hall of Justice.

Fornshaw stood with his hands upon his hips regarding his chief with a calm exterior.

"You deem me a traitor?" he said.

"Yes; with your lying dreams," returned Oka Wallah, "you would tempt me to abandon my sacred duty, which is to exterminate those who have mocked, and cried 'Ha, ha,' and pointed the finger of scorn at the faithful."

"Oka Wallah, I have served your people well."

"While you served yourself. But now you would turn from us. A renegade to his own people can be worse to strangers."

"Why not charge me with being false to you?"

"In my own time, Fornshaw. Already it is murmured among my people that your presence here is the cause of our lacking water."

"It is folly," said Fornshaw, "foolishness. I crave of you a more merciful consideration of my position."

He knew while he asked it that he pleaded in vain, nor was he really seeking any consideration at the hands of the hideous chief.

Oka Wallah rose up, and, spreading out his arms, bade him leave the tent. The next moment Fornshaw had him down with a hand upon his throat.

Oka Wallah was powerless, and he knew his end had come, but he struggled as well as he was able for his life.

"You would denounce *me*!" whispered Fornshaw, in a tone of voice that was as the hiss of a serpent. "I knew it was coming, for even as you watched me to-day, I watched *you*."

Oka Wallah endeavoured to thrust away the hand that was upon his throat. Failing that it sought his girdle.

"Too late," said Fornshaw, sternly. "*Die!*"

One thrust only with a keen dagger he drew from his belt, one convulsive movement on the part of Oka Wallah, and all was over.

Fornshaw rose to his feet, carefully re-arranged his disordered attire, and walked calmly out of the tent, closing the linen folds at the entrance.

Strolling up to a group of Dervishes squatted on the ground he addressed them in the measured tones they all affected.

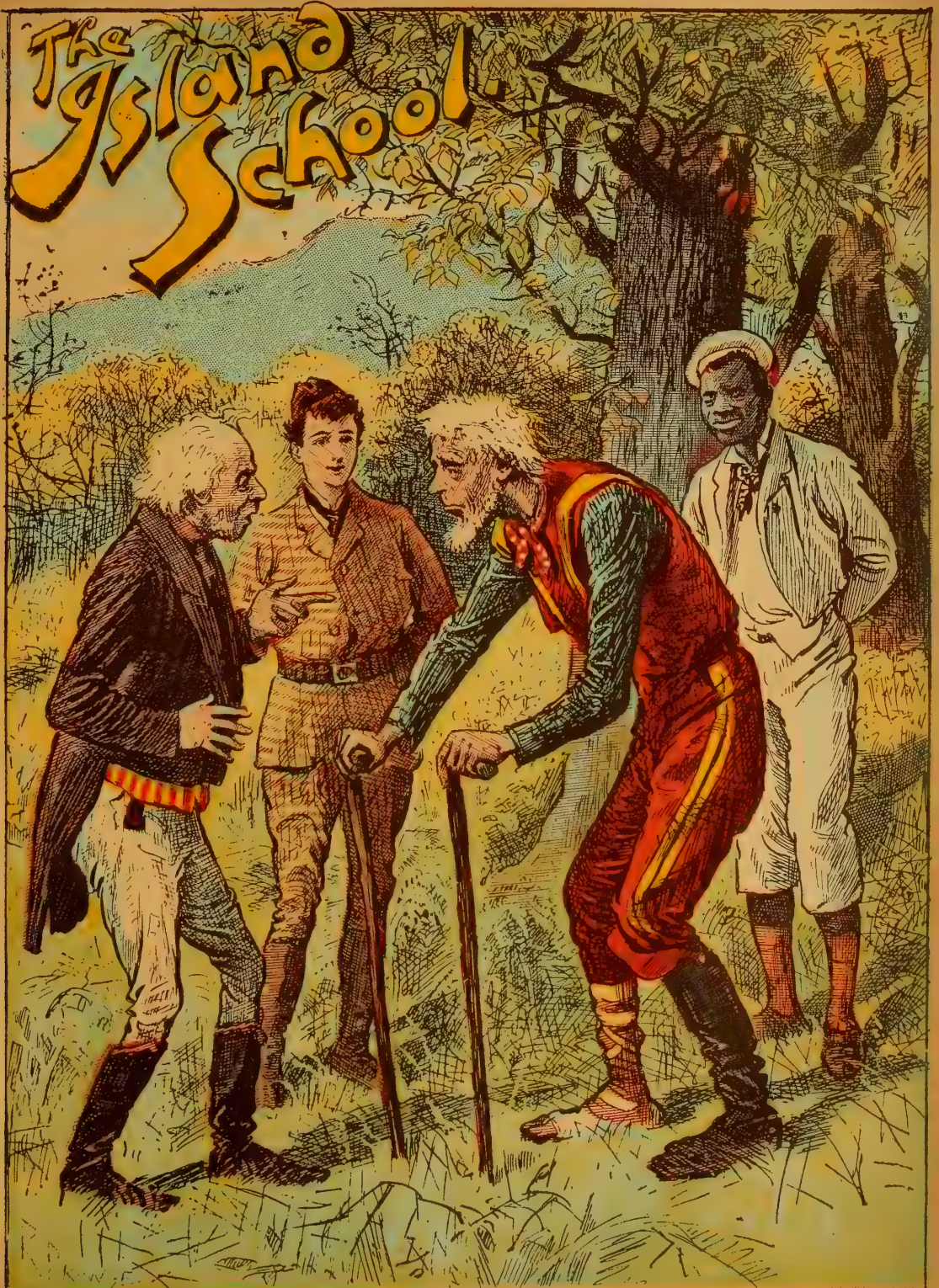
"Behold!" he said, "it is the pleasure of Oka Wallah that he be left alone to-day. At night, he saith, water will come to you in a shower of rain from heaven. Be comforted."

And they believed him. So all the day they patiently waited for the night, and then, as the tent still remained closed, some of their number once more wended their way to the fountain, crawling up the square on their stomachs so as to conceal their coming from those they knew were watching.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.

The Island School.



"CHANGED," said Chorker, staring at the schoolmaster in turn. "Grown old, have I? If I have, so have you. Why, you're a—drat yer—a—a REG'LAR METHOSERLER."

No water was found, of course, and some of the boldest went on to the houses near, seeking they hardly knew what. But it chanced they lighted on the place where Jira Gordon had stored his stock of wine.

He had brought but two dozen bottles with him, but it was of the old potent sort found in the big cellars of the castle.

The Dervishes conveyed it down to their brethren, among whom Fornshaw now was not.

Under the cover of the night he had left the camp, for he knew that a discovery of the death of the chief ere long was inevitable.

The wine as yet was untasted. The Dervishes placed the bottles in their midst, and held a whispered consultation as to the advisability of drinking it.

"It is the mad drink of the infidel," said one.

"But we thirst," said another. "Why should we perish while we have the wherewithal to moisten our parched lips?"

"He speaketh well," chorused others.

But still they hesitated. The rain promised by Oka Wallah, through Fornshaw, might come and save their bodies from dying with thirst and their souls from perdition.

But the sky remained clear. No cloud dimmed the lustre of the stars. There was not a breath of wind.

"Shall it be," said one, as the morning drew nigh, "that the prayers of Oka Wallah avail nothing?"

"Perchance," suggested another, "he hath in prayer fallen asleep."

It was a reasonable idea and found much favour. It was probable that somnolency had come upon the great man. There was a general movement towards the tent. There they hesitated awhile and listened keenly. No sound within broke the grim stillness.

One of the more daring carefully parted the folds of the tent, caught a glimpse of the prostrate form, and turning about, said:

"He sleepeth."

Oka Wallah had betrayed their cause. They all felt it was so.

A Dervish who sleeps when he ought to pray was a sort of extra unpardonable sinner. They could go in and wake him and be without reproach. He could not charge them with a crime, having been caught napping himself.

Therefore, with bold hearts they went in and saw that he slept the sleep from which there is no awaking.

In a moment, as it were, the camp was like a hive of roused bees, or shall we say a disturbed nest of hornets? Instinctively and justly they charged Fornshaw with the murder, and he was gone. Their wrath was overwhelming, maddening.

"Let us go up and slay his people," they yelled, "the renegade—the infidel may be with them now."

"But we are weak," suggested another, "shall we not strengthen ourselves with wine, even if it be the drink of the accursed?"

A yell in the affirmative was the response, and the wine was opened. They knocked off the necks of the bottles, and poured the liquid in the drinking-cups.

A glass of it in ordinary times would have had an intoxicating effect upon their stomachs, ever accustomed to wine.

But they drank more, and it set their blood on fire. It transformed them into reckless fiends, and with much shouting and wild dancing they trooped upward towards the square.

CHAPTER CCLIX.

THE MAD ATTACK IN THE MORNING.



FOR more than a week the boys had been cooped up, and the time hung heavily upon their hands.

They were getting tired of inactivity. Twice during the last four days Chorker had been sought in the vault and not been found.

It was, however, discovered to be impossible, in the time at their disposal, to go all over it, or to ascertain with any accuracy the full dimensions of that vast place.

Morse conducted these expeditions, and Jim limited the time to an hour, as it was always possible that an attack might be made upon their place of refuge.

Then every clear head and strong arm might be wanted.

Little doubt was entertained of the fate of that wretched old man. He must have wandered away, got lost among the ten thousand pillars, and so perished.

"Unless," said Morse, "he has succeeded in getting out."

But this was hardly deemed possible, and he was given up. Still Morse was bent on going down a third time, and was about to start on the eventful morning when the Oka Wallah was found dead in his tent. Jim was then inspecting the barricade with the view of altering it.

"I was thinking," he said, "that we might so arrange the shores, lessening their number that we could shift the thing in a few minutes and quickly replace it. Nothing has been seen of those beggars, and they may have gone away."

With a crash the battering-ram struck it, and one of the shoring pieces yielded.

Another such a blow and the whole thing must fall. "Back!" cried Jim, "and let us take one of the tables with us."

There were four in all, placed end to end and forming together a very long dining-table for all.

In a body the survivors seized upon the lower one and dragged it to the doorway below, and turned it over so as to form a barrier from behind which they could fire.

As they fixed it up, the battering-ram again struck the gate, and the shoring on one side yielded. The bronze-work swung round and lay over at an angle, making a gap about ten feet wide; and uttering horrible cries, the swarthy Dervishes came pouring through.

Three more shots from the defenders laid as many of the foes prostrate on the flooring, but the rest took advantage of the presence of the huge stone seat, once occupied by king or judge, and advanced to force the new flimsy barrier to their murderous progress.

Jim cast a backward glance at the trap, and saw that all but Morse had descended. It was almost time that he and the rest followed.

He silently gave the signal, and the Dervishes having ceased to cry out and yell, there was for a few moments a marked stillness in the hall.

But it was brief.

As Jim turned to go, there was a sudden commotion in the hall—a shouting of men, and a crashing of fire-arms and ring of steel.

Other voices than those of the Dervishes were heard; and Jim, without knowing who it was or how aid had come, felt that rescuers were there.

He boldly leapt over the table, but he could see little but a mass of struggling men in a cloud of smoke.

A Dervish sprang towards him, and he had barely time to whip out his revolver and shoot him down.

Then Martin, and Changeling, and Johnny Daw were at his side, and with encouraging shouts, they pressed forward into the fight.

Now he saw one whom he had long known. It was Giuseppe, and with him were a number of other men clad in the attire, so well known to Jim, of the Spanish smuggler.

Swift and terrible punishment was dealt out to the foe.

Dazed and staggered by an unexpected assault from the rear, the Dervishes defended themselves but poorly, and escape was impossible.

Powder, and shot, and steel laid them low, and no quarter was shown.

If any were spared immediate death, it was but to die quickly from gaping wounds.

Cries for mercy were not heard. The Dervishes

were not wont to spare an enemy, and if they could do naught else to perfection, they could die

"Mute as foxes 'mong mangling hounds," when they had fallen.

The regrets they may have felt about the end of their work were never spoken; and before the smoke of the weapons had vanished in the warm air, every one of the swarthy bodies was still in death.

CHAPTER CCLXI.

GIUSEPPO EXPLAINS WHAT HE HAD DONE.—LUCIA DI VALO IN ANOTHER LIGHT.



"Senor," said Giuseppe, as he rolled a cigarette, "it came into my head that, but for help, you and your noble friends were lost; so I hastened to Minorca, and called my people together."

"And you said not a word to me," said Jim.

"Well, senor," replied the smuggler, "I thought that you might object to my going. It was possible that you would think I intended to desert you."

"To my shame, I did think so," said Jim.

"Senor, I knew it. Every man would have thought so."

"I certainly did not reproach you, thinking that you had already more than repaid us, if you were ever really in our debt."

"Senor," said Giuseppe, "the price of a life is never paid. But let us talk of other things. There is yet another friend of yours upon the island whom you have not seen."

Jim looked at him, puzzled.

"Senor, I left Lucia di Valo in the Long House. She desired to come with me, but I wanted no women in the task I had set myself."

"She is very impetuous," said Jim, thoughtfully.

"In love and hate, too, senor. She was untamable at one time, but all that is changed."

"I shall be glad to see her, Giuseppe, for the past is nothing. She acted according to her instincts and her love for—"

"Poof!—a mistake," said Giuseppe, blowing away a cloud of smoke. "There was yet another man to come along whom she could love. Senor, you see how it is."

Jim saw it, and he hardly knew what to say. Somehow, he wished Giuseppe something better for a wife than the fiery erratic Spanish woman. Giuseppe smiled. He understood Jim's hesitation.

"Wait until you see her, senor," he said, "then congratulate me."

"I wish you well, and her, too," replied Jim.

They were reclining on the steps of the Hall of Justice, and it was the evening hour. All signs of the recent fight, save the dreadful stains on the stone flooring of the hall and the paving outside, had been removed.

The dead Dervishes lay in one of the houses awaiting interment on the morrow. Smith and Trueberry were in another building.

In the square the boys and men were walking about, happy and thankful that the terrible time had passed away. Mingled with them were the thirty-odd men Giuseppe had brought with him, who, after a few days on the island, would return to their homes.

Romeo and Charley, the bear, were rambling about like two old cronies. They had been kept apart by an untoward closing of the door of a room in the fowl-house where the bear was kept.

Charley had lost a lot of flesh, and no doubt suffered much mentally; but he was of a buoyant nature, and with good feeding in the woods would soon be himself again.

Morse sauntered up and sat down by Giuseppe and Jim. He had been thinking over something that was, to his thinking, rather of a delicate nature.

That was the matter of rewarding Giuseppe's friends. To the smuggler he knew nothing could be offered without hurting his feelings.

Bearing in mind that he had in his possession—or, to be more correct, stored away in his cave laboratory—the jewelled turban Oka Wallah wore on one of his earlier visits to the island, and that it was from this man's followers Giuseppe's men had saved them, Morse designed devoting a portion of the jewels to the purpose of rewarding the rescuers.

He informed the smuggler that he was in a position to give that form of acknowledgment to the men, and Giuseppe approved.

"They are but men," he said, "and they are poor. More than that, they gave their services as my friends, without hope of reward. Therefore it will come as a surprise, and have a double value in their eyes."

Jim remarked on the absence of Forshaw, the renegade, among the dead. Oka Wallah's body in the tent had already been found.

"He would not take a part in the attack," said Jim. "I liked the man, and shall be glad to meet him again."

"Depend on it, senor," replied Giuseppe, "we shall find him on the island. May peace rest on it henceforth!"

The smuggler doffed his cap as he breathed this wish fervently, and Morse and Jim echoed it.

The spoils of war consisted of the tents and the

weapons of the enemy, both of the finest make, and as specimens of the arms and manufacture of a comparatively savage people, they were valuable.

The tents were made entirely of silk, and the embroidery on most of them, especially on that of Oka Wallah, were wonderful pieces of work.

"We will have no more of the city," said Jim, "but camp on the plain outside."

"We cannot leave it yet," remarked Morse. "I must get into the store-room of the vault and have a look at some of the hollow places in the walls. They were not made for economy of labour, or without some purpose."

"Will you never be content, Morse?"

"We may never have another island like this to explore, Jim."

"Odds against it," said Giuseppe, "for mark you, senors, it was a great people who lived here once upon a time. And to think of the fools who were here a little while ago, holding on to their superstitious fears, believing in a city accursed, and all that faddle. And yet I was as big a fool as the rest."

And Giuseppe sighed as he thought of what might possibly have fallen to his lot if he had ignored the idle tales and personally explored the castle on one side of the island, and the Dead City on the other.

Martin undertook to carry out the interment of the dead, as Jim and Morse on the morrow arranged to cross the island with Giuseppe, who was going to see his followers off.

For the most part they were young, and as Jim gave them some of the arms of the Dervishes, they were full of talk about the way they would speak of their daring deeds when they got home again, to the mortal envy of their friends of the male sex and the complete subjugation of the dark-eyed maidens.

"But for these good swords and rifles," they said, "it would have been said that we bragged and lied. But now, who shall declare it?"

They were up half the night singing songs, and several had brought their guitars, on which they pleasantly tinkled in accompaniment.

With the rising of the sun all were awake, and breakfast was served out; for it was recognised that as the days were now very warm, the better time for walking would be in the cool of the morning.

Almost at the last moment Romeo asked to accompany Jim as his servant, and he was allowed to do so.

In camping there is always a lot of little things to do, which can be better done by persons of Romeo's position.

How familiar the path through the wood was getting! It had now been so often trod that it was as clear to the eye as a highway.

They were getting also to know the best places to halt at noon or night, and there were the ashes of the

old camp-fires to act as forest-marks, where breaks in the journey ought to be made.

The woods, to the delight of all, abounded with game. Jim had never seen a quarter, nor, indeed, a tenth, of the quantity of pigeons, pheasants, partridges, hares, and other eatable creatures before.

The increase of birds Giuseppe accounted in a measure for, by mentioning the facts that had come to his knowledge concerning the amount of shooting done in the early part of the year on Gibraltar rock and the Spanish mainland.

"It was the English officer who begin," he said, "so the Spanish officer follows, and it is blaze and blaze away all day. Birds are not such fools to stay to be killed, and they come to Fermentera for peace."

"And they get it," replied Jim, holding up a string of partridges he had shot for supper.

It was a happy time again, and the journey being leisurely performed, it partook of the nature of a rest after the recent exciting events.

Giuseppe had many a good story to tell of the smugglers and their haps and mishaps, of wonderful runs, of times of wealth and days of poverty, and also of periods spent in the shadow of a prison.

"That," he said, with the sophistry of his class, "was no disgrace. Smuggling is not theft. You beat the Customs, or the Customs beat you, as the case may be."

At last they arrived in sight of the Long House; it was in the evening, with smoke curling from the chimney. Giuseppe laid two fingers on his lips and sent forth a piercing cry as a signal to Lucia di Valo that he was coming.

But to their surprise, and to Giuseppe's no little consternation, Miss Elegantine emerged from the house and smiled upon them as they entered the stockade.

"I daresay," she said, "that you hardly expected to see me here."

"Faith—no," said Giuseppe; "are you alone?"

"Quite alone."

The face of the Spaniard paled until the brown of his skin was a dull tan.

"I left Lucia di Valo here," he said.

"And she is out fishing," replied Miss Elegantine, "with that dunderheaded schoolmaster rowing. *He* row! It is as much as he can do to sit still in a boat."

Great was the relief of Giuseppe, and Jim could have laughed as he saw the change in his expressive face. Morse stole softly away to get the jewels he designed for the reward of Giuseppe's men.

"But Lucia *fishing*," exclaimed Giuseppe; "she must be getting tame indeed."

CHAPTER CCLXII.

VERY TAME INDEED.—A WARNING SOUND IN THE NIGHT.



THE party had brought with them an abundance of game shot during the afternoon. It was a necessary precaution, for there were no stores worth mentioning at the Long House.

"When I set eyes on you all," said Miss Elegantine, "I turned cold, for I knew I had nothing to give you for supper."

"The men will look to their own," said Jim; "they are used to it."

"And Romeo will tend to Marse Jim and de special party," remarked the owner of the name, "so you jess sit down, Miss Dibble, and be de lady ob de house."

Giuseppe went out and down the path to meet Lucia, and it was getting dusk when Mr. Farrell, laden with fish on string, appeared, in a very grumpy humour.

"Where is Giuseppe?" asked Miss Elegantine, when the brief and somewhat curt greeting between the schoolmaster and his one-time pupils were over.

"He is coming along," growled Mr. Farrell, "annoying the senorita with his attentions."

"Hoity-toity!" exclaimed Miss Elegantine. "Annoying her, indeed! Why, the man is going to marry her."

"What! she marry that coarse smuggler?" Mr. Farrell was quite red with indignation.

"That is so," said Jim.

He flushed deeper than ever. There was no doubt Lucia di Valo had made an impression upon him.

"There is no fool like an old fool," remarked Miss Dibble, eyeing him closely. "In my opinion you have been meditating getting a divorce from your present wife, and marrying the Spanish beauty."

"You have no right to make such an assumption," said Mr. Farrell.

"With the right or not, I make it," was her calm reply. "Bah! it makes me ill to look at you. Here they come. After that, sing small."

She pointed to the gateway of the stockade, where Giuseppe and Lucia were standing, exchanging whispers. Jim just glanced at them and turned away. Mr. Farrell sat down with a fixed expression of face.

"That woman," he said, "gave me distinct encouragement the other day."

"Ho, ho!" cried Miss Elegantine, "then I was

right. Oh, you miserable worm! Make yourself useful. Brush down the table for supper."

It was plain that he had learnt to obey, for he rose up and removed sundry articles from the table. While thus engaged, Giuseppe and Lucia came in. The Spanish beauty offered her hand to Jim.

"My brave young English boy," she said, "how you have grown! so soon to be a man! Giuseppe, I love the great Jim Gordon."

"I am glad to hear it," said Giuseppe, laughing lightly; "he is worthy of it. But it is the love of a true woman for a brave spirit."

"So brave," she murmured; "but there must be no more fighting."

She was changed, and it was for the better. The old eager, fiery look in her eyes was gone. Their expression was softer—more womanly, as we love to think it should be.

And not the least thing to marvel at was, that Giuseppe should be the man to win her after all.

Morse came back from a visit to his laboratory, and drew Giuseppe aside to show him what he had brought for the men—a score of diamonds out of the turban of the departed Oka Wallah.

"You will know where to dispose of them," said Morse, "and divide the proceeds. There will, I think, be about a hundred ducats—golden ducats—apiece for your men. Is it enough?"

"Senor," exclaimed Giuseppe, "they will be rich. They have risked their lives often for a fiftieth part of the sum. It is magnificent!"

The men camped outside, and the night being warm, they were to sleep in the stockade.

To Miss Elegantine and Lucia di Valo one of the rooms was apportioned. Jim and Morse went back to their old quarters.

Mr. Farrell, on being asked to share the room with them, gloomily said he was going to walk late, and would probably sleep outside.

"Anywhere," he said, dolorously, "will do for an outcast like me."

Then he stalked gloomily forth, and for the time was seen no more.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Morse.

"Spoons on Lucia," replied Jim, as they walked into their room.

"Well, that was outside my calculations," said Morse, and they both laughed heartily.

But though it was a comical matter to them, it was a serious affair to the schoolmaster. He was undoubtedly much in love with the dark-eyed senorita, and although the feeling would probably be fleeting in one of his shallow nature, there it was, and it drove him to wander forth at night, like a sentimental schoolboy.

It was dark enough by the castle. The only light

was that of the stars, and the trees hard by had put on their thick summer foliage.

Mr. Farrell walked down to the front of the castle, and sat himself down on one of the stones embedded in the soil.

"The minx!—the—the dark-eyed little hag—no, no hag; she is a beautiful gazelle," he muttered—"to flash her smiles upon me as she did, and then to-night to—treat me as dirt."

And as the only vent to his feelings, he groaned aloud.

As he ceased his dolorous moaning a sound of a similar nature arose close by, as it seemed to him. What was it? Could it be an echo?

But no, it was more than that, for as he speculated on its nature the sound was repeated.

It was a low, deep growl or a rumbling, either from afar or deep under his feet.

Always a coward, it was no marvel that his hair stiffened and his blood ran cold, as he listened. Even a brave man might have felt a tremor at that moment.

"More horrors!" he groaned. "But is it the earth in the agonies of a coming earthquake, or some huge beast that has landed on the island shore?"

He could not tell, and the desire to fly from the spot was denied to him for a moment. When he attempted to stir, his knees gave way under him.

Then again was the rumbling heard by the terrified man, and now he knew for certain that it came from under his feet. The earth was in travail with fire and water commingled, and an earthquake he felt certain was imminent. He got upon his feet, and reeling towards the Long House, sent up piercing cries of alarm.

CHAPTER CCLXIII.

THE RETREAT FROM THE LONG HOUSE.—WHAT THE NIGHT REVEALED.



FROM a heavy sleep the travellers were roused, and instinctively the band of smugglers got their arms ready for a fight. But as they jumped upon their feet they saw it was only one man, and he half-palsied with terror.

"An earthquake!" he gasped. "Fly for your lives! To the wood!"

Now there is nothing in connection with our world that has such potent terrors to all men and nations as the power of the earthquake.

The slightest shifting of the earth—slight in a comparative sense, we mean, of course—is calculated to weaken the strongest man, and give him a feeling of his own insignificance, combined with helpless insecurity.

In accompaniment to the warning of the schoolmaster, there was another rumbling, and among the band there were some who had heard it before. Once heard it cannot be forgotten.

"Fly!" they yelled.

"To the wood!" roared Mr. Farrell.

"No!" was the answering cry. "To the open ground below!"

The earth now heaved beneath their feet, and some fell grovelling on the ground, crying to the saints for mercy.

At that moment Jim and Morse appeared, hastily putting on their coats. They had a pretty clear idea of what was impending, notwithstanding their lack of experience in such a matter. One need not be educated to the earthquake shock to know it when it comes.

"Where are the women?" sang out Jim.

"We are coming!" screamed Miss Elegantine, from the interior. "Goodness me! tell us what is wrong."

"Come out quickly!" replied Jim. "Giuseppe, is that you?"

"I am here, senor," was the reply.

"Keep your men cool, and lead them along the cliff. Don't go down to the sands. For the present, the higher ground I believe to be the safer. Romeo!"

"Here me am," gasped Romeo. "Oh, wurra dat?"

The earth shifted, or rose again, and the men cried out in their terror. Mr. Farrell grasped Jim by the arm.

"Save me!" he groaned.

"I do not hold your life in my hand," answered Jim, sadly. "Endeavour to keep quiet, and bear yourself as becomes a man."

But the unhappy schoolmaster could do nothing for himself. As a third shock was felt by all, he sank in a heap upon the ground. Just then Lucia di Valo and Miss Elegantine came out of the Long House. The former was as neatly dressed as if she had performed an elaborate toilet; the latter somewhat dishevelled, and her wig the behind part before.

They bore themselves wonderfully well. Jim hastily explained what had happened so far, and pointed out that it was deemed advisable to get away from that particular district. Morse said nothing, but kept his eyes upon the dark outline of the castle.

Giuseppe, after calling to Lucia to follow, was moving rapidly out with his men, and acting on Jim's advice, they made for the cliff.

Romeo was shaking all over, but he kept by Jim, who took Lucia di Valo by the hand.

"Giuseppe has gone on in obedience to orders," he said; "let us follow him."

"He did right to obey," said Lucia.

At that moment Giuseppe came hurrying back. He had seen his men on the way to the cliff, and had returned for Lucia.

"Too late," she said; "the young senor has the care of me."

"You could not be in better hands," said Giuseppe. "Senorita Dibble, your hand."

Morse now cried out:

"Hasten, and walk wide of the castle walls."

As they hurried out, the ground again shifted with that curious, indefinable motion associated with earthquakes. Thousands have felt it, none can really describe it. In haste they left the stockade with Romeo in their train, and Mr. Farrell, forgotten by all, was left behind.

He made an effort to get upon his feet, but, limp with fear, failed to do so. He strove to cry out, but his tongue refused to perform its office. Wildly he stared about him.

Then as a last refuge in that hour of peril, half-dazed, and too confused to know exactly what he was doing, he crept back to the Long House.

The object of the retreating party was to get away from the immediate neighbourhood of the castle.

Should the earthquake assume a very serious character it would be better to give a wide berth to the walls and towers, which, strong as they were, could hardly be hoped to stand against a greater shock than those already experienced.

Furthermore, the sinking of the tower was a proof of the insecurity of the foundations.

There were many reasons why they should depart from the familiar spot, and put as much ground between it and them as they could.

It was not until they were beyond the castle that Jim missed Mr. Farrell.

He might have gone back for him, but a tremor of the earth, more pronounced than before, extracted from Morse a cry to hurry onward.

It was not the time to consider the man, who had ever shown that he was all for number one, and if he could not save himself, should the worst arrive, nobody there could save him.

The speed was trying to the women, and Jim suggested a slackening down when a mile or so had been traversed. They had then arrived at a spot where the trees stood back from the cliff, leaving them a fair-sized space of open ground.

There they squatted down, the smugglers a little apart from the rest, and nearer the edge of the cliff. There was a gap of about fifteen yards between them and the other party.

Morse, looking ahead, saw that a little further on

the dense wood grew to the very verge of the sandy cliff, and it occurred to him that they were now in as good a place as they would find on that side of the chine.

So he suggested that they should remain there till daylight, and if nothing more serious happened, they could return to the Long House.

About a quarter of an hour passed away in whispering conversation, and then the dreaded event came to pass. The earthquake showed its power by seemingly swaying the entire island, first to the right and then to the left.

A crashing and rending of trees arose with deafening sound from the wood, and a roar as from some huge beast was heard in the distance.

One moment's rest, and then a most extraordinary thing happened.

The ground between Jim's party and the smugglers split in twain, and that portion on which the latter were sitting slid forward as if travelling on wheels.

The yells of alarm from the men sent Miss Elegantine off into a dead faint, the genuine article and no shamming, for the first time probably in her life.

Lucia di Valo uttered a prayerful exclamation, and covered her eyes with her hands.

Jim, Morse, and Romeo sat as if frozen to the ground, and this was what they saw with eyes that were fixed open wide with astonishment.

The portion of the cliff carrying the smugglers with it travelled along for some yards smoothly, and then broke up and rolled down to the ground below.

The shrieking men went with it, but, marvellous to relate, though they were in some cases partly buried under the sand, nobody was seriously hurt.

The great convulsion was over, and the ground shifted no more.

But Morse, hearing a loud swishing that reminded him of the undertow of a wave, looked seaward, and saw that it was receding fast, thrown back by the force of the earthquake. It would soon return like some monster tidal wave, and possibly rush up to the very cliff.

"Scramble up as high as you can," he cried to those below—"quick!"

Giuseppe, who had travelled with his men, heard the cry and recognised the voice. Cooler than the rest, he rallied his followers with a few hurriedly-spoken words.

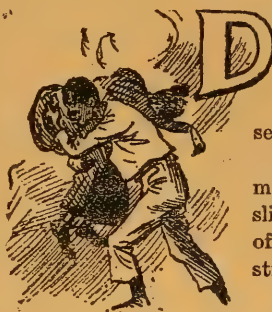
They understood what they had to do if they did not see the reason for it, and they began to scramble back.

Suddenly the sea shone with a phosphorescent light, and the coming terror could be seen by all.

Like a huge wall the water came towards the shore, its top crested with fiery foam, and casting off spray as a huge engine throws up its smoke.

CHAPTER CCLXIV.

THE MORNING AFTER.—FAREWELL TO AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.



IS 'bout de mose awful ting my eyes eber see!" cried Romeo, aghast.

"It is terrible," assented Jim.

Morse was watching the men scrambling up the land-slip and calculating the result of the huge in-coming wave striking the shore.

In places it might be slightly broken by the rocks,

but opposite where they were the sea must inevitably sweep right up to the cliff.

There was a possibility of the mighty wave, as it struck the soil, washing away yet more of the ground, and Jim bade Lucia di Valo and Miss Elegantine retire inland. It was then that he noticed the latter was insensible.

"All right, Marse Jim," said Romeo; "me carry her."

It was well for the delicate feelings of that lady she was insensible, or she would have been terribly shocked at finding herself being carried over a nigger's shoulder like a package of drapery.

Lucia di Valo said, "I will wait for Giuseppe," and remained until the smuggler, covered with sand and earth, appeared over the edge of the broken ground.

In quick succession the men arrived, and were helped upwards by the hands of Jim and Morse.

As the last was being hauled into safety the dreaded wave struck the shore, and with a deafening roar shot up to the cliff.

There it broke and rose high in the air, casting forward a vast arch of foam and spray that broke over the heads of the men and youths as they ran to the woods.

As it fell it drenched them to the skin, but that was a minor casualty, at which they might have smiled had they been in a less serious mood.

Next to the terror of that rushing in was the scream of the receding waters as they returned to the bed of the sea.

Again and again, for five successive times, big, wall-like waves pounded the shore, but losing force in every assault, and finally ended with a boiling and hissing, as if in some huge cauldron, that lasted for ten minutes or more ere it died away.

That was the final effect of this awe-inspiring phenomenon of nature, and it was followed by a stillness that was absolute and complete.

It lay upon all, even on the human witnesses of its power.

Truth to tell, they were waiting with fast-beating hearts for some renewal of the commotion. But as the minutes passed and nothing more was heard, they gathered courage and congratulated each other on their merciful escape.

Miss Elegantine came to herself and tried to make believe that she had not fainted at all, but when Romeo told her that he had carried her into the wood upon his shoulder, with her head dangling on one side and her legs on the other, she confessed to the truth.

"Had I been in my senses I could not have permitted it," she said.

There was some talk of going back to the Long House, but Morse advised waiting for daylight, as there might be a repetition of the shocks.

"There are a few hours to wait," he said, "but we are safer here."

Each and all made themselves as comfortable as they could under the circumstances. Some lay at full length upon the ground, others sat with their backs to the trunks of trees, and, strange to say, a somnolency soon became prevalent.

They were as people fatigued with a long journey. The warmth and stillness of the air had something to do with it, but in the main it was the reaction after a period of strong excitement. Whatever the cause may have been they all dozed off, and ere long profound sleep prevailed.

From dreams that bordered on nightmare Jim awoke and found that the day had come. The sun had been above the horizon for half an hour or more. His companions still slept.

He arose, and walked to the edge of the cliff and looked down upon the beach. As far as he could see it was strewn right and left with the objects, animate and inanimate, that are found at the bottom of the sea.

We use the term animate in the past sense, for the fish, known and unknown, lying stranded on the shore were all dead.

Among the inanimate he saw huge stones and pieces of rock, and a perfect shoal of small pebbles of every variety of tint and colour.

Here and there were fragments of wrecks that were covered with barnacles, and looked as if they had gone down to the bottom of the deep centuries before.

It was a sight such as he had never so much as conceived. The old well-known sandy shore was there no longer, but a stone-covered beach lay stretched before his eyes.

He awoke his friends, who all marvelled at their having slept so long, and having in their turn sur-

veyed the scene below and commented on it in every variety of expressions of surprise, they set out for the Long House.

In the haste of their departure they had left their arms behind them, and in addition to being without food, they had nothing to shoot with.

As they proceeded along, Morse noted that changes had taken place everywhere, although the shock had been felt more severely in some places than in others.

When he arrived at the spot where the castle ought to have been visible he looked for it in vain.

But he made no remark, as none of his companions at the moment seemed to notice that anything was missing.

His next anxiety was for his cliff laboratory, and he was overjoyed to find that in its neighbourhood the ground was practically unbroken. That, at least, was safe.

But where was the castle? They were all looking for it at last, and inquiring eyes were turned on Morse. He hurried on in silence.

At last they came in sight of the castle, or, to be absolutely correct, the spot where once it stood.

The greater part of it had sunk down out of sight, and only a flattish, confused heap of stones remained aboveground. The castle of Espelnador was no more.

A lump formed in Jim's throat as he surveyed the ruins, for he had learned to love the old place, endeared to him by many a happy hour, and time of peril overcome.

Morse, too, was deeply affected.

Romeo showed his emotion by clutching his wool and staring wildly about him.

"Pears to me," he said, "dat something happen here."

"An amazing catastrophe!" exclaimed Giuseppe.

"And whar de Long House?" asked Romeo, in an agony.

That, too, was invisible, but from another cause.

It had not sunk out of sight, but been buried under a perfect chaos of earth and tree-trunks.

And more, the earth on which it stood had slipped forward fully fifty feet, and the ground below was broken up in every conceivable manner.

Once more the castle path was gone.

"Farrell must be lying under that heap," said Jim, "but it is possible we may find him alive. Anyway, we must try to save him and recover our rifles."

"There are some provisions in the house in the chine," said Miss Elegantine. "We left them there on the day we met Mister Giuseppe and his men just landed. The thoughtful fellow had brought something with him, and that was what we lived on, Gordon, until you appeared."

Giuseppe took two of his men and started off for

the chine. The rest set to work pulling away the trunks of the fallen trees to get at the Long House, the roof of which was partially visible amidst the *débris*.

Lucia di Valo and Miss Elegantine played the part of lookers-on.

A good number of strong men with willing hands can get through a lot of work in two hours.

As for the lack of breakfast, the smugglers were no strangers to privation, and Jim and Morse were in too good trim to be much incommoded thereby.

At the end of the time named they reached the roof of the Long House, which had not suffered so much as was anticipated.

Some of the trees had fallen crosswise and acted as shields to the comparatively frail structure from the other *débris*.

A hole was soon made in the roof, and Jim and Morse dropped through.

They had hopes of finding Mr. Farrell unharmed, and as soon as they were inside they called to him by name.

Not getting an answer, they went on seeking their arms, giving their old schoolmaster up for lost.

Having entered by one of the sleeping-rooms, they did not find their weapons there, but passed on to the dining-room, to which a little light filtered through.

They were startled to see the form of a man sitting by the hearth with his hands outspread, as if warming them.

A second glance showed them that it was Mr. Farrell.

By the wall of the room the rifles of the men and their own were in a row. But they went up to Mr. Farrell before touching them.

"We are here, sir," said Jim; "pleased to find you are unharmed."

"What was there to harm me?" inquired Mr. Farrell, turning towards them with a smile.

Dim as the light was they could see that fearful changes had been wrought in him by a night of agony.

His face was wrinkled like that of a very aged man, and his hair was white as snow.

"You have been shut in here," said Jim. He hardly knew what to say, he was so inexpressibly shocked. "There has been an earthquake."

"It is not my affair," replied Mr. Farrell, testily; "you must really write to the Spanish Government. I suppose the other boys are bathing?"

His mind, disordered, had carried him back to the old schooldays.

"Will you allow us to assist you outside?" suggested Morse. "The door is locked, and we must get through the roof."

"Indeed," said Mr. Farrell, "I have no objection."

They left the room together, the schoolmaster humming a tune. In the dormitory Morse placed a chair upon one of the bedsteads, and invited Mr. Farrell to follow him.

"What has become of the staircase?" asked he.

Not getting an answer, he muttered vacantly, "Gone to be repaired, I suppose," and climbed through the opening.

On gaining the open air he stared about him in a bewildered fashion, but made no remark. Morse hastened forward to prepare the two women for the change in him.

They were also deeply moved on seeing the work of a night of terror, and Miss Elegantine hastened to speak to him more kindly than she had ever done before.

But he stared at her haughtily, turned aside, and sat down by the ruins of the castle.

"All this rubbish lying here," he said, "is unseemly. I must have it removed."

"The poor man," breathed Miss Elegantine, "has gone off his head at last."

"It may be only temporary," said Morse. "See, he is about to lie down to sleep."

Composedly, as if lying on a sofa in the old schoolhouse, Mr. Farrell settled himself down as comfortably as circumstances permitted and went off as quietly as a child.

"That is a good sign," said Morse.

Anon came Giuseppe back with the provisions, and the wants of nature, for the time, were satisfied.

CHAPTER CCLXV.

THE GOOD OF A LONG SLEEP.



IN all the time Jim had known Mr. Farrell he had never felt really sympathetic towards him until that day.

The change in his appearance was truly pathetic, and the childishness of mind he showed moved the brave youth to regret there had ever

been ill-feeling between them.

He could readily forgive him for all the past, and did so with all his heart.

Leaving Romeo to watch over him while he slept, the others went down to the beach to assist in the departure of Giuseppe and his friends. It had been decided at almost the last moment that the chief of

the smugglers should accompany his friends with the view of bringing back expected mail matter from Minorca.

Lucia di Valo, of course, accompanied him.

Tremendous havoc had been done in the neighbourhood of the lagoon by the storm.

All the boats had been cast up high and dry; but not so far from the sea as they might have been, thanks to the rocks on the other side acting as a breakwater.

Great havoc had been wrought on that once floral favoured spot. The rich flowers with their roots had been torn out of the hollows where the earth had gathered and been swept away. Only a barren place remained.

First of all, the men had to get their boats back to the water. No light task, but it must needs be done, and, working hard, they accomplished the feat in something under three hours.

But a small portion of the food brought from the chine remained, and Giuseppe would have none of it.

"Our journey will not take long, *senor*," he said; "we can wait. At Minorca we shall lack nothing."

The adieus were said, and more than ever was the change in Lucia marked.

There was a tenderness in her farewell to the boys that seemed to belong to a woman that had never seen the stormy side of life. She kissed them both upon the forehead.

"We may not meet again," she said, "for I shall not return hither."

Miss Elegantine, towering over her, took the slender form of the Spanish woman in her arms as if she had been a little girl.

"You were formed to make a man happy," she said, "I hope your lot will be a joyous one."

"I will try to live—as a woman," said Lucia. "These hands of mine will not carry a weapon again in their grasp."

She touched the sash where she used to have the ready stiletto, and Jim saw that it was gone.

And so they parted, the boat sailing away with a favourable wind, and the sky as clear of cloud as a crystal arch.

The two friends walked slowly back, climbing over the broken ground up to the spot where they had left Mr. Farrell sleeping.

He had not awakened yet, and Romeo, overcome with heat and fatigue, was keeping him company. Lying side by side, they were a strong contrast to each other.

"Mrs. Farrell will hardly know her Nap," said Jim, softly.

"If ever she sees him again," added Morse.

Though time was precious and they ought to be on their way back to Gordontown, they did not wake

the sleepers. Instinctively they felt that repose was necessary for Mr. Farrell, and might have a beneficial effect on his mind.

Morse and Jim, after surveying the ruins of the castle, sauntered into the wood with a rifle apiece to see if they could find anything to shoot.

"The caves under the castle," said the former, "are no more. An idea I had of making them historical places for travellers to visit must be abandoned."

"And your cataract must be choked up."

"I cannot think that, unless the earthquake has closed the chasm. It is possible, of course, but you and I will never know. It may be that in centuries to come some ready-witted man may guess what lies below, and open a jasper mine, such as I cannot but think the Romans of old must have worked, it may be in these regions, for the grand old city sent her sons everywhere."

"As our own country does."

"Ay, it is so. But for us there will be nothing but doubt if we tell the story of the caves. Or, if credited, we should not reap the benefit. By-and-by, when you and I are older, we may get a patent from the Spaniards to settle on the island—that is how we should have to put it—and work the land for our benefit."

"Looking ahead, Morse, as usual."

"I am always looking ahead. There is no profit in looking behind us. There goes a hare, Jim."

Jim's gun was up and fired in a moment. The hare turned a complete somersault, hit in the head, and they carried it back with them.

It would suffice for the needs of the day.

Mr. Farrell was waking up as they drew near. He opened his eyes, and stared about him in surprise.

It was seen that the vacant, semi-wild look of the early morning was gone from his eyes.

"Why, what is this?" he cried. Then he saw Romeo still sleeping, and drew aside angrily. "Confound the nigger! What does he mean by lying near me?"

"I am glad to find you are better, sir," said Jim. "The events of last night tried you very sorely."

"Indeed," said Mr. Farrell, with something of his old hauteur; "in what way?"

They could not tell him then how changed he was in appearance, but Jim ventured to mention his being left behind, and pointed out the results of the earthquake.

"We found you buried in the hut," he said, "and assisted you out."

"I remember perfectly," said Mr. Farrell; but it was plain that he remembered nothing.

"You were very tired, and lay down to sleep. As we had to see Giuseppe off, we left Romeo to watch over you."

"It was thoughtful, but needless," replied Mr. Farrell, with his old air again; "a man who has passed a whole night alone, and endured all the shocks of a continuous earthquake without fear, needs no guardian in the broad light of a still day."

"The same old tune," muttered Jim.

"So that rascally smuggler has gone away," said Mr. Farrell.

"He has," said Morse, drily.

"To return no more, I trust. We have had enough of the villainous breed."

"He will not come back again," said Jim.

Miss Elegantine now appeared, toiling up the rough ground. She had lingered on the beach until now. On espying her, Mr. Farrell frowned.

"Could you not have shipped off that woman with Giuseppe?" he asked.

No answer was vouchsafed him.

"How is the poor creature now?" asked Miss Elegantine, who did not observe that Mr. Farrell was mentally himself again.

"Who are you 'poor creaturing'?" he demanded.

"Not me, I hope?"

"Oh, you've come round," said Miss Elegantine; "well, that's a comfort, in one way."

"Will you tell me, madam, what you mean by 'coming round'?" cried Mr. Farrell.

"Indeed I will not, for it cannot be pleasant for you even to think of. I don't believe in talking to people about their illnesses."

An angry glance from the object of her consideration passed without comment, and Jim declared that it was time for them to be moving on through the woods.

"Where are you going?" asked Mr. Farrell.

"To Gordontown, for a short time," replied Morse.

"I," said Mr. Farrell, "will return to the chine."

"Then you go alone," remarked Miss Elegantine.

"That, madam, I am only too willing to do."

"And you will find nothing to eat," continued Miss Elegantine. "Provisions were running short when we came away, and about forty hungry men required a lot for breakfast."

"Hardly so many," said Jim, with a smile.

"They had appetites for fifty," she said.

"May I ask for an explanation?" said Mr. Farrell.

"Giuseppe's men," explained Jim, briefly.

"I was not aware there were men to be entertained at my expense," muttered Mr. Farrell.

"You saw them yesterday, sir."

"Where?"

He had forgotten even that. Indeed, it turned out that his mind was still a blank as regards the events of many days.

They mercifully spared him an explanation that might have been painful

"I thought you saw them," said Jim; "anyway, there is nothing in the house in the chine for you to eat, and you had better go with us."

"Through that accursed wood?"

"There is no other road."

Mr. Farrell groaned.

"All my life of late," he said, "seems to be that of a homeless wanderer. May I ask where we are at this moment?"

"By the castle."

"And where is the castle?"

"Those stones are all that remain of it," said Morse; "it was destroyed by the earthquake."

"To be sure," returned Mr. Farrell, lightly; "I remember. To be sure. It fell. The sight was a grand one. It would have shaken your nerves to witness it, but I regarded it as the result of one of Nature's freaks."

"Let us go on," said Jim. "Miss Dibble, I regret you have so toilsome a journey before you, but it is unavoidable."

"Don't you worry about me," she answered. "I can take care of myself, and I am a good walker."

"Fatigue," said Mr. Farrell, "is practically unknown to me. I am ready for this needless journey."

But in spite of this assertion, it was seen that as he moved up to the wood his footsteps were like his hair, indicative of old age.

CHAPTER COLXVI.

THE BONES OF LOST MEN.—A LIVING SKELETON.



THEY camped that night after getting over but little ground. Mr. Farrell was the retarding medium that led to their travelling slowly.

It was only to be expected that he would put the blame upon somebody else, but he did it in his especial way, not straightforwardly, but by working on a side issue.

"Miss Dibble," he said to Jim, "is getting into years. We must travel easily, for her sake."

Luckily for him, the lady did not know of his newly developed interest in her physical comfort, or she might have resented it. Jim, understanding the man, professed to believe in his affected solicitude for another, and merely said:

"Certainly, sir. It is very kind of you to think of it."

Romeo looked to a shelter at night for Miss Ele-

gantine, making it of boughs of trees. The others slept in the open.

They were, with the exception of the schoolmaster, inured almost to anything.

Romeo, waking early in the morning, proceeded to collect the materials for a fire; for, in spite of the season, open-air sleeping rarely fails to have a chilly effect on persons when they awake in the morning.

He had his old master and Miss Elegantine in his mind at the time.

Wandering aside from the direct path, he was picking up some fallen, well-seasoned sticks, when his eyes wandered to a clump of bushes hard by, and protruding from under them he saw something that brought his heart into his throat, and his eyes nearly out of his head.

It was a skeleton foot!

Now skeletons are uncanny things to come across in an unexpected manner. The strongest of men would experience a slight shock. To Romeo the sight was appalling. He dropped his collection of sticks, and staggering back to the camping-ground, awoke Jim.

"Git up, Marse Gordon, for de goodness' sake," he gasped; "dere sumfin dat gib me a clean turn ober in de bush."

Morse, hearing his voice, awoke, and asked what was the matter. Romeo explained. They all went to the spot, and there found, not only a skeleton foot, but the complete skeletons of two men.

Lying among the bones were several metal articles—a three-bladed knife, a bunch of keys, and a pinch-beck watch.

"This was Storeby's!" exclaimed Jim, breathlessly.

"And these keys were Turner's," said Morse. "Now at last we know what became of the two masters when they escaped from our enemies. They got lost in the wood, and starved to death."

For a moment there was silence. It was awful to contemplate on the fate of the hapless men.

"I have no doubt it is the poor fellows," said Jim, presently; "but how do you account for their bones being so clean?"

"Ants," replied Morse.

He pointed to a number of those busy little insects, still wandering among the bones in quest of any morsel that might have been overlooked.

"The winter rotted the clothing to dust, and the wind carried it away," said Morse; "the ants have taken the flesh, and naught but bones and metal remains."

"We must keep this from Farrell," advised Jim.

"Assuredly," assented Morse. "Romeo, you understand?"

"Yes, Marse Morse. But it am a awful sight, for sure."

"Also from Miss Dibble."

"Dat so, ob course. De nerves ob a lady allus got to be suspected."

All they could do was to cover the remains of the lost masters with such materials as they could scrape together with their feet and hands.

That done they returned to the camp, and a fire being lighted, Miss Elegantine and Mr. Farrell were aroused.

As expected, they gathered shivering beside the blazing sticks, the man grumbling at his hard lot, and the woman bearing things quietly.

The inconvenience they felt was soon dispelled, and some birds shot the night before were cooked and eaten with a relish that would have astonished some people accustomed to dainty fare.

Water was their drink, and they they had nothing else but salt to their food, of which necessary Romeo carried a small store in paper, but they were satisfied.

This was their life for the next two days.

Mr. Farrell continued weak, but insisted that he was the strongest member of the party. He was quite the old schoolmaster again, and talked of things as if he still retained his power over the boys.

Of Mrs. Farrell or Eveline he made no mention, and Jim sometimes wondered if he had forgotten them. It was possible, for as the time passed it was observed that he had mixed up matters generally in his mind, and was very clear on one subject only, and that was his own importance.

And now as they were drawing near to the strange old city a wonderful thing befell them. One who was considered to be dead came back to them.

They were sitting at rest—it was high noon—and had just finished their midday meal, when a gaunt form was seen staggering towards them.

It was a man, but he was so thin that his clothing hung about him like a sack round a maypole. But for all that Romeo knew him.

"It's ole Chorker or him ghose," he gasped.

And Chorker it was, with his skin hanging about his bones and his eyes sunk deep into his head, but still alive.

He came up to them, staring in a dreamy way as if not quite sure of their identity, and then, espying some fragments of food lying upon a dock-leaf, he pounced upon them and ate like a ravenous dog.

The silence was at last broken by Jim. He was the first after Romeo to get over his dumbfounded astonishment.

"Chorker," he said, "where have you been?"

"Iverywhere," was the feeble answer.

Mr. Farrell, looking coldly at him, remarked upon his changed appearance.

"You have grown thin," he said, "and look twenty years older than when I last saw you."

Chorker stared at the schoolmaster in turn, not recognising him at the outset, but he soon knew him again.

"Changed," he said; "growed old, have I? If I have, so have you. You are a reg'lar Methooselar."

CHAPTER CCLXVII.

THE TERRIBLE TRUTH.—UNCOMMUNICATIVE CHORKER.



Mr. FARRELL was a vain man. That was very apparent in his assumption of the Napoleonic character. Above all, he always believed that he looked very young for his years.

He took the reference to "Methooselar" as a deep personal insult.

"I," he said, angrily, "am barely forty."

"You look ninety," muttered Chorker.

"That will do," interposed Jim, sternly, "we will have no quarrelling here."

"It is safe enough to do it with me now," said Chorker; "I'm as weak as a rat. But if he jumped on me it wouldn't make me out a liar. *He do look ninety.*"

Then for the first time Mr. Farrell realised the fact that he must be terribly changed.

He could see it in the faces of others as plainly almost as if they had been mirrors.

But Jim would have nothing more in the way of personal insult. "Tell us," said he, "how you escaped from the vault."

"I ain't strong enough to talk about it now," answered Chorker; "let it be till we gits back agen."

They could see that he merely wanted, in a malicious spirit, to leave their curiosity unsatisfied. It had been powerfully excited, especially in the breast of the usually complacent Morse.

"Come, Chorker," he urged, "give us an idea of the method or the way of your escape. We thought you were dead."

"And were glad on," said Chorker.

"No, neither one nor the other. We had so much to think of that you were forgotten."

"And my memory ain't wot it was," returned Chorker; "I forgets how I got out. But I daresay with feeding up, and a drop o' wine now and then, I may pull round and remember agen."

For once he was in a position to be disagreeable without anyone being able to take him to task for it.

He was resolved on enjoying such an unwonted opportunity.

But one thing was evident to Jim and Morse when the time came to start. Chorker, when he came upon them, had no idea of the right direction to take to find Gordontown.

"Here, I say," he said, as they moved away, "ain't you goin' back to the city?"

"Yes," replied Jim.

"I thought it lay t'other way," Chorker muttered, with a bewildered look round, and fell in in the rear.

He was horribly weak, and walked with a rough stick he had picked from the ground. Romeo, moved to compassion, offered to help him along.

"Git out!" he snarled, "and help old Methooselar to peg on."

Mr. Farrell was much perturbed. The conviction that there was good cause for reference to his aged appearance worried him.

He hesitated a moment, and then said to Romeo:

"Give me an arm. I, at least, will not be churlish."

Jim and Morse with Miss Elegantine led the way, and Chorker came next. Mr. Farrell hung purposely more and more in the rear, until he could speak in a soft tone without being overheard.

"Romeo," he whispered.

"What am it, Marse Farrell?" inquired Romeo.

"You heard that fellow call me Methuselah?"

"Me did, Marse Farrell."

"Do I look like him?"

"Who am him?"

"Methuselah."

"Well," said Romeo, slowly, "berry likely you be, but at dis moment me not call to mind de pusson you name. Methusarum," he added, meditatively, "Methusarum! When me see him larse—"

"You could never have seen him at all," interposed Mr. Farrell, angrily; "he lived thousands of years ago, to a very old age. He was a thousand years old at the very least."

"Gorly pumpkins! Nebber?"

"He is an historical character."

"Den how you look like de man dat lib so long ago? Unless," said Romeo, sagely, "dat 'ere Chorker got a copy ob him photograff."

"He could not possibly have anything of the sort," said Mr. Farrell, testily; "what he meant was that I look *very* old. Do I?"

"You am reclined dat way," answered Romeo. "Take you 'bout de head you nebber look older. De cauliflower am pale to you."

"Do you mean to say that my hair is *white*?"

"White as—white as," replied Romeo, casting about him for something to compare with—"white as de whitest t'ing that eber was. All de black gone out ob you hair."

"Merciful Heaven!"

The man was overwhelmed with this confirmation of his worst fears, but he rallied in a few moments, and tried to smile.

"Many young men," he said, "have white hair; it has a peculiar effect; but when one retains the freshness of youth upon the cheeks, while the skin is smooth——"

"Marse Farrell, you berrer not speak 'bout it, but de fac' am you face am as full ob wrinkles as a well-dried pippin-apple. You older dan my granfader, older dan Chorker, older dan any two people rolled togedder me eber see. You change in de night when you was shut up, and had an earfquack *all to yourself*."

"Then I must be changed indeed!" groaned the schoolmaster. "Romeo, go on and leave me here to die! No, no; I did not mean that! I am sorely punished for my misdeeds and my cowardice. Romeo, I am a coward!"

"Dat 'bout de mortifful trufe," assented Romeo. "Yes, you bent dat way. So am oders. Dere no sin in dat, for it can't be helped if you born so. *It am de bragging, Marse Farrell, where de wrong come in.*"

Mr. Farrell said no more, and in silence they walked on, keeping within sight of the others, but holding back even when one of the frequent imperative halts was made.

Chorker remained grimly silent until he came to the brow of the slope outside the wood and looked down upon the city.

All men have their secrets, and he was resolved to keep the only one he ever had worth retaining.

They could not force it from him.

He could plead a loss of memory. Why not? A man who had lost as much flesh as had disappeared from his bones was capable of forgetting anything.

CHAPTER CCLXVIII.

ONCE MORE IN THE VAULTS.—THE OLD STOREHOUSE.



IT was somewhat surprising to the return party to learn that the earthquake had scarcely been felt in the region of the city.

The majority of the boys did not feel it at all.

They were sleeping in the tents now, and the old discipline of night-watching had been carried out, not from any fear of attack, but as it is done by our soldiers at home, to keep up the discipline of the force.

Furthermore, it was known almost for certain that Fornshaw the renegade was still alive, and the faith Jim had in the man was not shared by all.

On the night of the earthquake Felton and Hillyard were two of the sentries, and they each felt a slight tremor of the earth, but that was all.

The commotion was therefore confined mainly to the other side of the island. The old city was only stirred by the very edge of the earth-wave.

The intelligence of the ruin of the castle caused some surprise, although it had generally been looked upon as doomed since the tower had sunk out of the perpendicular.

But this feeling gave way to the astonishment created by the change in the appearance of Mr. Farrell, and the reappearance of Chorker.

The dogged old man refused all information concerning the way of his escape, and in his fashion enjoyed himself hugely.

"I've been starved body and brain," he said. "I'm thin all over, in and out. I can only jest hobble along, and I can't think at all."

"Let him be," said Morse. "I will find out the way he left. To-morrow it is my intention to see if I cannot open that store-house. It may be empty, but I shall never rest until it is done."

One thing had followed the earthquake which was very welcome. The water had returned to the springs in the wood, which the reader will remember had suddenly dried up, and left the Dervishes with only the fountain for a supply.

When that failed them we know what ensued.

It was a trying journey to fetch water from the vault, and the reopening of the springs was very much appreciated. In the absence of Morse none had cared for the task of going to the vault, but finally they had made a strong party of it and gone down armed.

"Why?" asked Jim, when this was laughingly explained to him by Terry. "To shoot the ghosts that worry Romeo?"

"Well," answered Terry, "we don't like the dismal hole, and what is more, we never shall."

"When Morse has got through his exploration of the place," said Jim, "we can return to the old spot. After all, I like it best. It is a pity the castle is gone, but we can build a house by the chine and try to forget it."

"We oan live in the tents during the summer," said Terry. "As for a house, we may never want it."

"Perhaps not," answered Jim, and on both there rested a momentary feeling that their surmises in that direction might come true.

"We can't live here for ever," sighed Jim. "How I shall hate the old life when I return to it! Fancy being cooped up in London after *this*!"

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



"Goodness help him!" said Changeling, in a muffled voice. "HE IS going to swarm up the thing."

Morse was busy that night calculating what he should take with him down to the vault. For once in a way his favourite forcing medium must be abandoned. The storehouse, if such it was, could not be opened by blasting.

"The force required," he explained to Jim, "would be such that it might weaken or wreck the roof above, and it would be an awkward thing to bring down a whole city on our heads."

"What do you hope to find?" asked Jim. "Treasure?"

"Perhaps nothing much, anyway. But I am curious to find out what the ancients kept there."

Jim shrugged his shoulders. He was not curious on that point. But he sorely wanted to learn how Chorker had got away. That could surely be done by a full and complete exploration of that strange underground place, with its untold pillars of stone and its storehouse of bronze.

"While you are fiddling about that bronze thing, which I believe to be a gasometer," said Jim, "I will have a look round outside for the Chorker exit with some of the fellows."

"What do you call my storehouse?" asked Morse, smiling.

"A gasometer. It is shaped like one, isn't it?"

"It is."

Morse answered with a peculiar dryness in his voice that rather amazed Jim.

"Is there anything wrong in my comparison?" he inquired.

"Oh, no," was the reply, "not at all. How could there be anything wrong in it? I am much obliged to you."

"For what?"

"I will tell you to-morrow."

"Between you and Chorker," said Jim, "I shall die of curiosity. Why should I wait till to-morrow?"

"That sounds something like a part of a song, Jim. You will have to wait till to-morrow, because I won't give you my reasons for being grateful to-night."

When Morse declared that much, there was no more to be said, and Jim restrained his desire for information.

In a discussion, shared by all that night, it was discovered that about half the boys were eager to accompany Jim. Morse did not require more than three assistants, and he wished them to be Martin, Changeling, and Romeo.

Privately he bade Martin get the best substitute for crowbars he could, unless he had brought such things with him.

"I have what will serve," said Martin.

Mr. Farrell and Chorker sat gloomily apart from all, each wrapped in his thoughts. They were still in a weak condition, and, when the time came for rest,

crept into their appointed tent, also occupied by Martin and Changeling, and the three negroes:

There they were presently found lying undressed, and sound asleep.

"It am a great change in de ole massa," said Macbeth, as he surveyed the face of the schoolmaster with the light of a lantern thrown upon it. "He hab had a rough time ob it, for sure."

"He mose as old as you," said Romeo, maliciously, "barrin' you a lilly more whiter 'bout de wool."

"Dat a libel on you' granfader," said Hamlet, severely.

"I parse him imperence by like de idle wind," remarked Macbeth, loftily, "in dat suspect he hab a good sample for *him* ole age, when he lose de blackness ob him wool, and hab a grandson to insulk him."

"By dat time," said Romeo, "you not be here to worry me."

"If you get wrangling, I'll put you outside," growled Martin, who was making up a couch for himself. "Don't forget, Romeo, that we are off as soon as it is light, to have a long day."

"All right, Martin," said Romeo; "me 'member. What Marse Morse goin' to do wif dem crowbars?"

"Ask him," grunted Martin; "how should I know? He's got a notion in his head, and I'll bet my life it is something good."

They were soon all asleep, and, as it seemed to Romeo, awake again a few minutes afterwards.

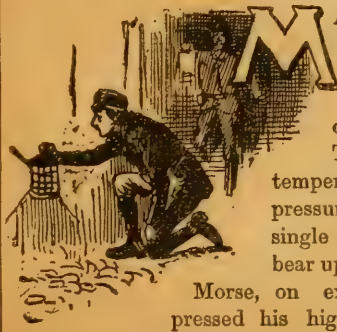
But he had merely slept soundly and dreamlessly, and the morning was at hand.

Romeo rose in response to a call from Martin.

"Now, Romeo, I am ready. Changeling, on with some of your clothes, and be ready as quickly as you can. I'll warrant young Morse is awake and stirring."

CHAPTER CCLXIX.

THE SECRET OF THE STOREHOUSE.



MARTIN had provided four strong iron bars, about four feet long, with one end wedge-shaped. This was especially tempered, so as to resist a pressure more than any single man could bring to bear upon it.

Morse, on examining them, expressed his high approval of their make and shape.

"They will serve my purpose admirably," he said, and the blacksmith was pleased, as most people are

when they do their best and their work gives entire satisfaction.

Provision, and other arrangements, had been made for a stay below of some hours' duration. They did not wait for the others to be up and stirring, but set out as soon as they were ready.

For each man there was a lantern and several candles. Morse was similarly provided, and Romeo, with his lighted, led the way into the huge vault.

"There were mighty builders in the old days," said Martin, as they walked in the direction of the storehouse.

"They had unlimited labour, and it was cheap," replied Morse, "that is half the secret of it. The rest may be summed up with a word or two—rude but effective mechanical appliances. Archimedes declared that if he had a place to stand upon he could construct a lever that would move the earth."

"Dat a job, Marse Morse," grinned Romeo, "dat no ornary workman do if he paid double time."

The huge bronze cylinder was reached, and if ever a thing looked immovable on earth that work of ancient art did.

But whatever doubts may have been entertained by the men they were not expressed. Morse bade them keep where they were while he walked round.

Having lighted his lamp, he started, stooping low and examining the bottom of the structure. There was an accumulation of dirt and dust round the base, which might have been nearly a foot thick in places.

It was soft and damp, and easily moved.

Morse completed the circuit and rejoined them. Pointing to the dirt alluded to, he said that must first be removed.

"From the door?" queried Martin.

"There is no door," answered Morse; "it is a sham, meant to deceive and lead astray strangers like ourselves."

Martin rubbed his head, more puzzled than ever, but he set to work with the rest, and, as the dirt was scraped through, it was discovered that every few yards there was a small hole in the bronze circular wall, about two inches in diameter. Morse laughed softly to himself, as if some surmise of his had been found correct.

But he made no reference to it until they had gone the complete round and paused to rest from an hour's work, trying, on account of its having to be performed in a stooping position.

"Now," he said, "cannot you guess the way to open this puzzle?"

"Blessed if I can, sir," replied Martin.

Changeling smiled feebly. He had no more notion of the secret than a babe in arms has of the first problem in Euclid. Romeo, however, was more venturesome in giving an opinion.

"You goin', Marse Morse, to fill up dem holes wif you patent powder," he said, "and hab a blow up."

"And bring the whole city down upon us," returned Morse; "no. This thing acts on the principle of a gasometer with counterpoise weights, so that a little effort will raise it. But there is a difference in the weights being *inside* here, while with the gasometer they are *outside*. It was a remark of Gordon's that led me to come to that conclusion, and now I am sure it is the right one."

"Well," gasped Martin, "if you——" and then he stopped, unable to go further.

"This bronze casing," continued Morse, "is, in my belief, not so solid as it appears, although it is strong enough to defy ordinary efforts to break through it."

He struck it with the bar as he spoke, and it gave out a deep, booming sound, like a big, muffled bell, or the dull ringing of a huge metal basin.

"My plan," said Morse, after a deep echo in the vault had died away, "is for all of us to act in concert from four different quarters. We thrust our bars through these openings. They go right through, and there is no doubt there is a metal plate on the other side, which will enable us to use our tools as levers. I will put you in position, and the signal to start will be a blow on this metal cylinder with my crowbar."

"If we four can raise it," said Martin as they moved along, "it will be a surprise to me. Such delicate poising I should have thought impossible."

"And maybe," said Changeling, "the weights will not act. The pulleys may be choked with dirt."

"Do not forget the beautiful provision made for keeping the gates outside in working order," said Morse. "We shall find that nothing has been forgotten, and arrangements made for the easy working of this wonderful piece of man's ingenuity practically for all time."

He had already marked the place for each to stand, and a lantern for Martin and Changeling having been lighted, he left them at their several posts, and finally put Romeo in his place.

Then he returned to the original spot, and struck the bronze cylinder a blow. The moment it began to boom in its impressive bell-like fashion he inserted his crowbar, and put all the strength he possessed into working it as a lever.

Once, twice, thrice he strained with all his might, and then the shell—it proved to be no more than three inches in thickness—began to rise.

Through the gap of an inch or so made between it and the ground there rushed out an odour that was not unpleasant. It reminded Morse of what he had read of the aroma of the Spice Islands.

Another effort, and up, up went the cylinder until it was raised as high as his knees.

He could see the light of the other lanterns, and hear the cries of astonishment and delight uttered by his companions as they paused to rest.

"Your hands will do now," he said. "Raise it a foot higher."

Once more they laboured, and the cylinder was raised high enough for him to enter with ease.

"That will do!" he shouted. "Come round to me."

They gathered together, the three assistants amazed and excited. Morse was as cool as ever he had been in his life.

"Just as I thought it would prove to be," he remarked, easily; "but it is Gordon we must thank for the discovery. That suggestion or observation about the gasometer did the trick."

"You would have found it alone, sir," said Martin. "I should like to see the thing that would entirely puzzle you."

"Everything puzzles me," rejoined Morse, "and the more I find out the more I wonder. We will rest a bit while the air gets in. Give it ten minutes, and then we will have a peep inside."

Romeo was already on his hands and knees, endeavouring to get an early view of the interior. He could see a number of boxes and bales piled one above another, and bundles of what appeared to be cloth or tapestry.

"Golly!" was all he could say.

Morse passed the time of rest in making a few notes in a small pocket-book he always carried with him. He was putting down the results of the last hour's work.

"One of these days," he said, "I may write a book, and having seen so many wonderful things, some of them may be forgotten."

"Not by me," said Martin.

"If I told of these things," remarked Changeling, "to some people I knows at home, they would call me a born liar."

The time of rest was up, and Morse led the way in. They had to stoop to get under the bronze cylinder shell, but it was high enough for his present purpose.

"Whatever we find," he said, "we cannot remove it to-day."

They could not go far in for the piles of bales and boxes Romeo had already dimly seen. They filled almost the entire centre of the storehouse, and were piled high up overhead, so that the light of the lanterns barely showed them the top.

First of all, Morse turned over a parcel that appeared to be a roll of carpet. It was held together by wire of the nature of ordinary bronze, but a lighter colour. As he brought a file, it was soon cut through, and Romeo, by his direction, rolled it out.

And a carpet it was, of silk and golden wire, the pattern most beautiful.

Shut up in that air-tight place, neither damp nor moth had harmed it. The colours were almost as bright as when fresh from the maker's hands.

CHAPTER CCLXX.

THE GOODS AND CHATTELS OF A LOST PEOPLE.



HAVING gazed in breathless admiration, Martin said, "We found nothing like this in the houses above."

"These things were not for the common people," retorted Morse, "and whatever there may have been of carpet or tapestry in the olden days, the inhabitants, when they departed from the city, took their goods and chattels with them."

"P'raps dis was a sort o' ginerall shop," suggested Romeo.

"Dry up, you durned nigger!" growled Changeling. Morse laughed merrily.

"It is not a bad idea," he said. "It is possible that the rulers in those days kept everything, and doled out to the people such things as they earned, or could pay for. Romeo, do you think you could climb up to the top of that pile of bales and pitch one down?"

"Suttinly," replied Romeo, glaring at Changeling, "unless some more cleber pusson dan me feel comperent to do de job."

"If you mean *me*," said Changeling, "I can do it."

"Come out ob de way!" cried Romeo.

But Changeling had already started, and Romeo, with an angry growl, plunged after him. Side by side they clambered up, until they were but dim shadows above.

"Give the word, Mr. Morse," sang out Changeling, "and stand clear."

"Let dat 'lone!" Romeo was heard to cry. "What me come up here for?"

"Don't wrangle," shouted Morse. "Now! Stand clear, Martin!"

Something was heard coming down, and they stood aside to give it falling-ground. But it was not a bale.

It was Romeo.

Whatever may have caused his fall will never be really known. He afterwards vowed that Changeling threw him down. Changeling, in defence, asserted that he slipped and fell.

It was a long fall, but not a particularly dangerous

one, for the arrangement of the pile was in the form of a pyramid, and Romeo rolled down, step by step, until he reached the stone flooring, on which he came with a sufficiently powerful thwack. It deprived him of some of his breath, but not all of it.

"You tink you done a cleber fing, p'r'aps!" he roared. "Jess wait a minute till me got time to gib you anoder look up dere!"

"Stand clear!" shouted Changeling; "the goods are coming."

"Now, if you——" began Romeo; but the rush of a descending bale reaching his ears, he scrambled out of the way with a celerity that proved he had broken no bones when he fell.

The bale came down with a force that burst its wire bonds asunder, and the wrapper splitting in a dozen places, a quantity of small cloths and other things were disclosed.

In the centre were some knives, with blades of bronze fixed to strong wooden handles. There were some metal plates also, a few silver chains about the thickness of an ordinary dog-chain, and a looking-glass of crystal in an oaken frame.

And all the articles appeared to have been used.

Morse turned them over curiously. If this were indeed an ordinary store-house, the authorities had very mixed ideas about keeping their goods.

"Send another bale down, Changeling," he sang out. "Help me, Martin, to shift this lot."

It was done in a twinkling, and another bale came to the ground.

This was unlike the other in shape and size, one being square, and the other more like a bundle.

Its bands defied the fall. Morse had to cut them to open it.

Another assortment of linen and things presumably used for domestic purposes, and all having at one time been in use was pretty well certain.

There were some knives, which had been sharpened again and again, until the blades were worn away, and one was broken. The bundle also contained a piece of parchment, with writing on it which Morse could not read; but, by the arrangement of it, he judged it was a list of the contents.

"It beats me," mused Morse. "We must see what is in one of the boxes."

These were mixed with the bales, and looked as if they were both stout and strong. The tops were covered with sheets of bronze, but there were no locks visible. That much they could see, but with the weight of the mass of things above them the lower ones were hopelessly fast.

In response to a question, Changeling announced that things were mixed above, and if a box was wanted it could be sent down as soon as he had shifted a weight that rested on it.

"Let that weight alone," cried Morse.

But he was too late. Changeling had shifted a weight that rested on the box, and an exclamation of surprise was heard from his lips.

"I didn't see it was a-dangling from a chain," he cried; "it's gone up a foot or two."

Morse wheeled about and saw that the bronze shell of the storehouse had descended, and was in its old place again.

"How very foolish of you, Changeling!" he cried.

"What have I done, sir?" asked Changeling.

"Closed us in," was the reply.

"And we have left the crowbars outside," exclaimed Martin.

"Dat all de result ob habin' a fool pottering about t'ings he knows nuffin' 'bout," said Romeo; "you not see de chain, stupid?"

"No!" roared Changeling. "What is the matter?"

"I tell you," said Morse in his old quiet way, "that you have shut us in."

"Well, sir," said Martin, with assumed cheerfulness, "it won't be for ever. They will miss us by-and-by, and come to seek us here."

"Not before night," returned Morse; "remember that we came provided for the entire day."

"Even that won't be long, sir."

"Too long, perhaps. Don't you perceive the peculiar odour given out by some of these bales?"

"I admit," said Martin, "that it is peculiar."

"It has a soporific effect on the senses," asserted Morse. "I can feel it already."

Martin sniffed it suspiciously, and admitted that it "had a sleepy odour about it."

"It is as well to look things in the face," said Morse. "I have done wrong in not letting Gordon know my views of the structure of this place. Then when he came he would have had no difficulty in getting at us; but now when he at last thinks it is time we ought to be back he will come on here and find four crowbars outside—nothing more. He will never guess that we are inside."

"We must try to keep awake, sir."

"We may try our best, but not be able to do so. I am sure of it; and once asleep we shall sleep on. There will be no more awakening for us, without assistance, in this world."

"It was my duty to have brought the bars in," said Martin, bitterly.

"It was the duty of us all, but we did not do it. There let the matter rest as far as that goes. Changeling, you may come down. I have no longer any curiosity about what is in the bales."

"Mightn't we find something in one of them that would help us?" hinted Martin.

"We might, but I doubt it. I can see now what this place has been intended for."

"You can see backward and forward further than most all of us put together."

"When the city was besieged at any time," said Morse, "the people brought and stored their valuables here. No enemy could get at them."

"Unless he got in by the way Chorker went out, sir."

"Even then this place would be impregnable. The people could have no safer depôt to hide their valuables. It was done more than once, I feel sure; and when it was resolved to desert the city all they could not carry was stored here."

"But they were never coming back again."

"Some cunning ruler or priesthood may have had that in view, and lacking faith in the city's being accursed, tempted the people, or commanded them to store their goods here, intending one day to return and appropriate them."

"That sounds reasonable."

"I feel it is. But the plans of knaves oft go astray, and the false friends of the people may have perished ere they could carry out their scheme of robbery. How close the air is getting!"

Changeling now joined them, in a penitent mood, but as what he had done was a pure accident, that was neither the time nor place to reproach him.

"It is very hot and stuffy up there. I nearly fell asleep."

"Let us look round on the chance of finding something to help us," said Morse. "Romeo!"

"What de marrer?" asked Romeo, who was dozing off.

"Get up."

"Certly, Marse Morse," was the drowsy reply.

But he did not rise, and they left him there while they hurried round to see if there was aught that would help them in that hour of undoubted peril.

CHAPTER CCLXXI.

THE FINDING OF THE RENEGADE.



NO anxiety was felt regarding Morse, and Jim at an early hour after breakfast proposed to the boys that they should all assist in endeavouring to find out the way Chorker had left the city.

It was his opinion that it would be discovered not far from the walls.

But prior to departing he made a final effort to extract the information from the reticent Chorker.

He found him sitting outside the tent where he slept, in the full enjoyment of a morning pipe. Contrary to Mr. Farrell, who did not show signs of rallying back to health, he was recovering quickly from the effects of his hungry pilgrimage in the woods.

"Now, Chorker," said Jim, "I am going to ask you for the last time a question. You can perhaps guess what it is."

"Let me see," murmured Chorker, thoughtfully tapping his brow, "you was a-speaking to me about summat, but—dash it! I niver was so bad in the head before."

"I see," said Jim, "it is quite useless to put the question. Now understand me, it will not be asked you again. I can find it for myself."

He walked away, and as the boys were arranged in parties they started off, taking, by the advice of Jim, different directions, so as to cover a fair space of ground in the region of Gordontown.

Mr. Farrell, like Achilles, was sulking in his tent, but he overheard what had passed. After Jim was gone he came forth and took Chorker to task for being a fool.

"Up to a certain point," he said, "you did right in having your way in this matter, but now you have gone too far. It was your one chance of making friends with the boys again."

"And you," retorted Chorker, "have lost yours for iver, too."

"I," said Mr. Farrell, haughtily, "await for them to seek reconciliation with me. The estrangement that undoubtedly exists is more to their disadvantage than mine."

"Don't see it," said Chorker, with a grin.

The one other person left in the camp was Miss Elegantine, and Charley, of course. The bear at the time was sleeping in Jim's tent, and Miss Elegantine in hers was performing her extra toilette.

Macbeth and Hamlet, having a few hours to themselves—all the day, if they wished—were gone over to the sea-fishing.

The schoolmaster, having had his little wordy war with Chorker, sauntered about idly with a brooding face. Although he never referred to his wife and daughter, they were very often in his thoughts. Whatever may have been the feeling he had entertained for Lucia di Valo, it was evanescent, and was gone. It departed with many other things relating to his life on the island prior to the night of the earthquake.

But the things of long ago he remembered perfectly. He bitterly regretted having entered on the mad scheme of keeping a school on the Napoleonic principle of absolute authority; but anger was the chief factor in the feeling he encouraged towards Mrs.

Farrell and Eveline. He considered they were parties to his detention on the island, and had conspired with Miss Elegantine, in fact, and he never loved them less than at that hour.

As for that aunt of Dibble's, he hated her with a deep and undying hatred, and her suddenly emerging from her tent and confronting him was as welcome a sight as a tiger in the woods is to an unarmed man.

He was afraid of her, as well as imbued with hatred, and in his changed condition shrank from her gaze like a frightened child.

"Why do you moon about alone?" she asked; "it would have been better for you to have gone with the boys."

"That was a matter I hope I may decide for myself," he said, softly.

"Certainly," was the cheerful rejoinder; "but you are better when in company, for it isn't good for you to be alone."

Her manner was kind enough, and he was open to agreeable companionship, though it was that of one he hated. Loneliness, both by night and day, had a terror for him he could not account for.

"I am going to gather some flowers," said Miss Elegantine; "you had better come with me. I'll get another basket."

She had one in her hand, which she gave him, and from the tent brought out another. Together they started, he conscious that he was being treated like a little boy. And he felt old, so very old.

"Now take things easy," said Miss Elegantine; "there is a lot of time ahead of us."

Chorker, who had watched the scene with an ugly grin on his face, saw them disappear in the wood, and then felt he was monarch of all he surveyed.

"I'll amuse myself," he muttered, "by overhauling these 'ere tents. Shouldn't be surprised now if there ain't a heap o' wallables stored about. I can sweat 'em a bit if there is jewels or money, and not be found out."

That was the one idea of his life since he came to the island—the finding of treasure. It had haunted him throughout, and he was certain that the boys, especially Jim and Morse, had some of both jewels and gold in their possession.

To the tent occupied by the two friends he went, and boldly entered. Charley was not in his thoughts, and he walked right in, up to the top, past the sleeping animal without seeing him.

"Now here's boxes and bags," he muttered, "and none of 'em locked, as I see. That is like young fools: they are so trustful."

As he raised the lid of a box, Charley opened one eye and lazily looked about him. In a moment the other was also wide open.

"Linen on the top," said Chorker, half-aloud;

"it's cur'us how clean they keeps things, considering; but then, what they doesn't wash themselves, that Romeo chap does for 'em."

He lifted up the linen and came to a sudden pause.

What was it he heard behind him?

It sounded like a stealthy footstep, but it might be only the wind rustling the cloth of the tent.

He was almost sure it was that, and yet he had not the courage or strength of body to turn and look.

Pit-a-pat! It was not the footstep of a man. It was too slow. There was quite an interval between the fall of one foot and another. It must be the wind.

But now it was nearer and still nearer. Two huge hands clasped his waist. He looked down at them, and saw that they were paws. The terrible truth burst upon him.

"Charley!" he shrieked, in a shrill voice, and then sank limp and lifeless, to all appearance, on the ground.

Charley let him go, and, as he lay in a heap, turned him over so as to see his face.

The bear regarded it with a speculative eye, as if half-believing that the faint was a sham. But having stirred Chorker with his paw several times without any effect, Charley was convinced that he had a senseless man to deal with.

A contented grunt was uttered in recognition of the fact, and then the huge beast stretched himself out by his side.

It was at this hour that a man emerged from the wood far away to the south, and stood there regarding the tents with a critical eye. It was Fornshaw, the renegade.

He bore the arms he possessed when with Oka Wallah, and he showed nothing of the starved and hunted look which characterised Chorker after his wanderings in the forest.

To all appearance he had fared well during his voluntary lonely sojourn in the sheltering wood.

The first expression on his face on beholding the tents was that of surprise. He evidently did not expect to find them there. Then his manner changed to that of one who has reason to think there have been great changes during his absence.

There was none of even the slow movement of the life he had been accustomed to associate with those tents.

He glanced citywards, with a full view of the Hall of Justice from where he stood, and saw that the bronze barrier was no longer there.

"What has been done?" he murmured. "Without Oka Wallah the fiends would not have done much. It was his quarrel, not theirs."

In doubt he slowly moved down towards the camp. The stillness of it grew each moment more puzzling.

Then, as one inspired, he believed he had discovered the truth.

"They have overcome the boys and are in the city."

It made his blood boil with anger. After all, his blow must have failed in striking home. Oka Wallah had recovered and led his men to victory and slaughter. In a blind fury he resolved to take advantage of their absence and destroy their tents.

They could not be replaced, and furthermore, their loss would have a superstitious effect upon the swarthy owners.

That was the reasoning in his heated mind, and convinced at last that there was absolutely no living person there, he boldly strode round to the front.

Then he saw that all things save the tent were changed. Over the ashes of the morning fires, utensils that had never been in Dervish hands were swinging. All sorts of odds and ends appertaining to the more civilised life were strewn here and there.

One of the tents was open. He peered in and saw the schoolboy effects lying about in all the inevitable disorder of youthful habits.

"As I live," he cried, "the youngsters have won."

With a quick stride he passed from one tent to another, hoping to find one of the boys on guard, or sleeping, until he came to where Charley was keeping watch over his unconscious prisoner.

Charley stared at him heavy-eyed and disinterested. He made no sign.

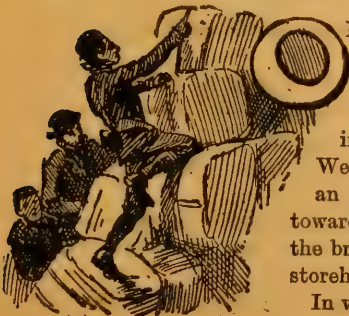
Just then Chorker came round, and, after a moment to collect his thoughts, recalled what had happened, and espied the renegade at the door of the tent.

"At him, boy!" he cried to Charley, in terror.

The bear, strange to say, rose up in obedience, and swiftly bore down upon the renegade.

CHAPTER CCLXXII.

THE PRISONERS IN THE STOREHOUSE.—A HAPPY THOUGHT.



NCE more we must join Morse in the vault below, where we left him in a perilous position.

We return within half an hour of the untoward closing down of the bronze casing of the storehouse.

In vain had they sought for some means to raise it again. There was nothing that would serve them, and as they hurried along the vast pile of storage, the

strange aroma became more and more overpowering. An idea entered the head of Martin. He afterwards declared that it was quite brilliant for him.

"If we lie down close to those holes," he said, "we may be able to draw in a bit of fresh air, and keep all right until they come to help us."

The prospect of lying there, drawing air through a mere rat-hole for hours, was not exhilarating, but it offered them the means of escaping from the influence of the insidious odours.

Romeo was already gone off, but he was as one sleeping. His breath came strong and steady. Morse entertained no fears on his account.

He and Martin and Changeling each sought one of the openings they had discovered, and found immediate relief. The fresh air they were able to draw soon fully revived them.

With that change came the clear mind, and Morse instinctively began to think over possible plans of escape. He had not been reflecting long when he suddenly burst out laughing. Martin, who was indulging in the most gloomy of thoughts, was startled. Not only was it unusual to hear such a sound from the lips of Morse, but the time and place had little of the element of laughter.

Changeling, too, was brought out of a fit of philosophical resignation to the inevitable, as he deemed it. Both men sprang to their feet. Morse had risen also, and was calmly looking to his lantern.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, "I am not insane. Madness is scarcely in my line. But what fools we must be! Verily I do not think there is a head among us."

"I have always reckoned on one," replied Martin.

"Come up to the top of the bales with me," said Morse.

"Eh?" exclaimed the amazed blacksmith.

"To the top of the bales, I say," repeated Morse.

"We shall be smothered up there, sir, and I for one ain't in a hurry to be sent to sleep."

"I don't see as it matters," remarked Changeling.

"The counterpoise weight!" cried Morse, gleefully.

"It is clear that there is only one. As it went up it let the cylinder down."

"Oh, yes—it did so," was the helpless rejoinder of the men.

"Well, it could not have gone far, could it, now? Say a few feet. All we have to do is to get hold of it and *hang on*. If that isn't enough, we can attach some of the bales or boxes, and down it comes. Then up goes the cylinder. Now can you see?"

"It is wonderful, sir, that you get at everything in time."

"We may find the air very close up there, but with a handkerchief over our noses we shall be all right. Come; time presses."

He led the way, and they scrambled up the great pyramid of stores to the very top. There the level was about twelve feet square, and offered them a liberal standing-room.

About eight feet over their heads hung the counterpoise weight. At its base it was a foot or so in diameter; the length of it could not be seen.

"Hoist me up," said Morse.

Martin lifted him in his strong arms, and Morse climbed to his shoulders.

"Stand steady!" was the next word, "and put your hands behind my ankles—just as you have seen the fellows at a circus do it."

Martin carried out his instructions. Up to the present they had not felt much inconvenience from the state of the atmosphere. Indeed, it seemed to be purer at that elevation than it was below.

"This weight is longer than I thought," said Morse; "I can't reach the shoulder of it. Steady, I am coming down."

He dropped lightly again to their side, and whipped the file out of his pocket.

"I want some of that binding wire," he said, "a lot of it. Cut through the bonds of some of the outer lots."

He handed the file to Martin, and the blacksmith soon cut through half-a-dozen pieces.

"Lay hold," said Morse to Changeling, "and assist me in sending these things below."

They turned over two or three loosened bales, pitching out the contents, and holding on to the severed wires. Martin continued his labours, and he followed him up, collecting the binding material until Morse had a thickish bundle of it.

"That will do," he cried. "Now help me to weave it into a rope."

As they were at last beginning to feel faint in the sickly air, the expedient of tying their handkerchiefs over their mouths and noses was adopted. The effect was somewhat ludicrous, but they had no time to make merry over it.

The rope was made a dozen strands strong, and about as many yards were speedily twisted. Morse nodded to intimate that was all he required, and motioned for Martin to raise him again.

In a moment or two he was on the shoulders of the blacksmith, and when there he put the rope round his own neck. Changeling, holding up a lantern, watched him curiously, wondering what on earth he was bent on doing. Morse was putting his arms around the counterpoise weight as a boy does about the trunk of a tree, as a preliminary to climbing it.

"Goodness help him!" cried Changeling, in a muffled voice. "He is going so swarm up the thing!"

That was the intention of Morse, and immediately after the inspired thought of Changeling had been

uttered, Martin felt the spring and the after loss of weight of the daring youngster.

Now he could look up, and it was with a feeling of terror that he saw the weight oscillating slowly to and fro as if it were the pendulum of a big clock, and Morse holding on with the tenacity of a leech.

"Look out to catch him if he drops!" he roared through the handkerchief about his mouth.

But Morse did not drop. Up, up he went, until it was as much as they could do to see him by the light of the lantern. Then he stopped, and his voice was heard in its usual clear, ringing tone.

"All right. I have gained the shoulder. As soon as it is steady I will drop the rope."

It was soon steady enough for his purpose, and then down came the cord, accompanied with the cry:

"Lay hold!"

They seized it, and the next order was, "Tug away. I have made it fast!"

The two men hung on with all their weight, and, with that of Morse, it sufficed. The weight came slowly down with the triumphant youth astride of it.

"Slip the end under some of the other bonds," he said; "don't slacken it more than you can help. Anchor me securely."

They hastened to carry out his instructions, and the counterpoise was soon fully secured to a sufficient number of the heavier packages to ensure its not ascending again.

It was a fine mass of bronze about fourteen feet long. Morse slid down it and slapped Martin on the back in the fulness of his joy.

"Isn't it a splendid piece of mechanism?" he cried.

He paused one moment to see that the fastenings were secure, and then they descended to the ground below. In the breasts of all there was a strong desire to get outside the place, if only for a spell of rest.

At the bottom they came upon a spectacle that sent them into fits of laughter. When the heart is lightened a small joke suffices to tickle the risible faculties. It was Romeo, awakened from his lethargy by the rush of fresh air. He was sitting up, buried to his shoulders in all sorts of things that had been tumbled from aloft.

"Pears to me, Marse Morse," he said, "dat you been habin' a fine bit ob fun wif dis chile. It minds me ob de time you bury me in de chine."

"We quite forgot you were below," said Morse.

"No great damage is done."

"Barring a fork dey jess stick inter my ribs, dere nuffin' to complain ob. What dis? Dat ere ting gone up agen? Hooroar!"

He scrambled up, and as he rushed forward, they followed him out. In comparison with the sickening aroma of the storehouse, the air of the vast vault was declared sweet and pure

CHAPTER CCLXXIII.

DIBBLE BECOMES THE HERO OF A GREAT DISCOVERY.



JIM GORDON, when he set out on his expedition, thought of dividing the boys into about four parties, but eventually he decided to practically give them *carte blanche* to go where they pleased.

"Scatter about," he said, "but do

not go far from the camp."

Thus it happened they became split up into twos and threes, for it invariably happens in all bodies of men and boys that each has some especial chum, or it may be two, with whom he finds his so-called affinity, a term so often used to express harmonious dispositions.

Dibble and Dawson had been very chummy of late, and they soon detached themselves from the main body, and entered the wood on the north side of Gordontown.

There it was not so dense as the forest facing the gates, but the trees were bigger. In some places the wood had the appearance of having been thinned by an experienced forester, with the object of improving the landscape.

They also discovered, here and there, comparatively bald patches, where the weeds and wild grass grew with less luxuriance than was otherwise the case. It puzzled them for a while, but the mystery was eventually solved.

Dawson, with the butt-end of his rifle, scraped away some of the soil, and immediately beneath it found a slab of stone. He gave it a blow, and from beneath there arose a booming sound, such as would be emitted by a cavern beneath.

"The whole forest," he said, "is, like the city, built on a dome of stone."

"I don't think so," said Dibble; "none of these partly bald places are more than twenty feet wide and about double the length. They all shape in the same direction, too. I should say there is nothing more than a passage-way underneath."

"I say, Dibble!" exclaimed Dawson, "you are getting sharp. That is a very sensible suggestion."

"I rather fancy," was the complacent reply, "that I am not quite such a fool as I used to be."

They halted and had a talk over the matter, deciding in the end to devote their attention to these

partly sterile spots and trace them to the end, if it could be found.

It was not such an easy matter as it appeared to be, for as they progressed the wood thickened and dense patches of prickly shrubs occasionally barred their way. But they succeeded in tracing the underground way for about a mile, and there the density of the wood threatened to bar their further progress.

They scraped away a lot of the earth, and partly laid bare a slab of the purest marble, twenty feet or so broad and double the length. No attempt was made to thoroughly clear it, for that would be a task of hours; but the patch they scraped away showed beyond all doubt that it was a solid slab, and, with their appliances, practically immovable.

"We want Morse here," said Dibble; "he would lift one of these things in a twinkling. Then we should see what is underneath."

"But Morse is not here," said Dawson, "and all we can do is to return and report our discovery."

"We ought to make an effort to get along a bit further," suggested Dibble.

"As you like," said Dawson; "but I think we have come to a full stop."

Dibble dropped down upon his hands and knees, and, pushing his rifle before him, crept under the bush.

"Come along," he sang out; "it isn't so bad, if you are careful to dodge the more prickly bits."

"I don't know that I quite agree with you," muttered Dawson, as he followed him and started with getting a thorn like a darning-needle into his thigh. "Go easy, old man."

"I've found the track of some animal," sang out Dibble, a few moments later.

He was some distance ahead of Dawson, probably twenty yards, for the latter was proceeding with extra caution.

"Glad of that," growled Dawson; "anything to make the road a bit easier will be welcome."

He heard no more from Dibble, but, pushing on, came to the track he referred to. It was such as some wild boar might make with a single journey through the bush. It extended to the right and left, and plainly had been made a short time before, a few days or a week back at the outside, Dawson thought.

Always, in a measure, experienced in woodcraft, he had learnt much that was useful since their travelling about the woods. In due time by practice he would have made a passable Red Indian.

He looked to the right and left for Dibble, but he was not in sight. He called to him by name, and received no answer. This was puzzling and, to a certain extent, disturbing. As things were, he did not know which way to go.

"I say, Dibble," he said, "no larking. A game of hide-and-seek won't be very amusing here."

But there was no reply.

Among his other accomplishments Dawson could get up a very respectable imitation of the Australian "cooey," and putting his hands to his mouth, he sent that far-reaching cry echoing about the wood.

But when it died away the stillness was as profound as before.

"Dibble," he pleaded, "don't be an ass. I like a joke as well as anybody, but this sort of thing is out of place here."

He was getting really alarmed, for, as he declared, it was neither the time nor place for playing hide-and-seek, and Dibble, if he meant to have a joke, would hardly have carried it so far.

What then had become of him?

Here was the track of a beast. Was it made by some creature of a species hitherto unseen in the woods?

The track did not make it clear what it was. It might be made by a wild hog or a panther, or indeed any animal of ordinary size.

The air was very close and warm, and this, with the feeling of apprehension in his breast, caused Dawson to perspire profusely.

"I must go on," he murmured, "on the chance of finding him."

He looked to his rifle, and saw that it was clear of dirt about the muzzle. Then he cocked it ready for use and moved on to the left.

The track was pretty straight for thirty feet or so, and there it diverged to the right, probably to avoid a bush of extra prickly growth, which met overhead another bush, and notwithstanding it being day, there was a short, darkish tunnel to creep through. Dawson, seeing light at the other end, pushed on.

He was about half-way through, when his hands suddenly dropped, seemingly into a well, and on the impulse of the moment he let go his rifle.

It fell a short distance, striking stone, and then went clattering down, until somewhere deep below the trigger must have received a blow, and, being ready cocked, the weapon exploded, raising the most unearthly din Dawson had ever heard save on that occasion when he visited the castle caverns with Morse on that never-to-be-forgotten expedition to cross the chasm, beyond which the young chemist obtained his store of jasper.

Dawson shuffled back until only his head was over the opening, which was about four feet square. While the echoes lasted—and they were some moments dying away—he endeavoured to pierce the gloom below, and made out sufficient to assure himself that at the bottom of a small stone square on the left, not more than four feet deep, there was a flight of steps descending to a region he could not even guess at.

"Dibble is down there," he thought, and in the

silence far below he heard Dibble's voice, very faint, but clearly expostulatory.

"What are you doing, stupid? Do you want to put a bullet through me?"

"It was an accident," roared Dawson. "Are you far below?"

"I should say so," was the feeble answer. "I rolled most of the way, and have barked all the nubby bits of my body. Come down and help a fellow."

"All right!" cried Dawson, as he rolled round and carefully dropped into the well-like square.

On the left lay the steps that had brought Dibble to grief, and feeling his way, Dawson began the descent.

CHAPTER CCLXXIV.

A REUNION IN THE VAULT BELOW.



HAVING got clear of the huge cylinder, Morse asked his companions what they would do. They answered that they were entirely at his call. "We have had enough of the storehouse for one day," said he, "so let us have a general look round. We have never yet as-

certained the extent of this place."

"Perhaps we never shall," suggested Martin.

"Possibly," answered Morse.

They looked to their lanterns, and then Morse started off in an almost direct line from the flight of steps by which they came. His object was to keep on straight until he *did* come to a wall, and then work round it. It was his belief that the vault was circular in form. It was the most likely shape the builders would adopt.

In ten minutes a side of it loomed out of the darkness, itself black and grim enough to be repulsive.

The wall was of black marble, huge blocks fitting each other to a nicety, and, as in the case of the stairway, no mortar or cement seemed to have been used.

Its height they could measure approximately with their eyes, for it was not more than twenty feet above them. But the roof immediately sprang dome-shaped from it until all view of it was lost.

"As I judged," said Morse. "the vault is circular."

The bend of it was hardly visible, especially to an inexperienced eye, but it was there.

"First of all," said Morse, "we will attend to the inner man, and then for the trot round."

They had brought but a moderate amount of refresh-

ment with them, and it was soon disposed of. Strengthened and refreshed, they pursued their way.

It was a long walk, so long that all but Morse were beginning to think that they were going far away from the city. He, however, kept on, confident of the correctness of his theory.

At length they halted to rest, and while they sat by the wall, a sound like the muffled crack of a rifle was heard. It certainly came from a great distance, for it sounded very faint, and the echoing in the vault was merely a murmur.

"Now, what am dat?" muttered Romeo.

"It came from that direction," replied Morse, pointing straight ahead.

"Maybe it is a signal for us to return," suggested Martin.

"It may be," replied Morse. "We had better see."

Starting to keep a straight line was one thing, to keep it another. Morse, knowing this, bade his followers fall back, with a distance of ten yards between each.

"While we are in a line," he said, "we shall be going straight. I will take the head. Martin, you are the tail. The moment you perceive I am out of the straight, shout your loudest."

Martin promised to do so, and they went on for a while in perfect order. Then Morse suddenly swerved to the left.

"Out of line!" shouted Martin.

"All right," was the answer. "I know where we are."

They soon perceived that he had halted, and coming up with him, were astonished to find him standing before a square of marble, with one slab nearest to them lying on the ground, disclosing a dark, yawning opening.

"Look up," said Morse.

They did so, and saw they were under a staircase. They were, in fact, at the back of the one so familiar to them.

"Recently this fell," exclaimed Morse, pointing to the slab. "How or why I am not able to explain. They have gone aloft to find the way Chorker got out of the vault. We have tumbled on it now."

As Morse led on the others followed, but it was with quaking hearts, particularly with Romeo, who had his doubts about the advisability of going further down into the earth.

But happily for his fears they had not to descend far ere they came to a passage with a level flooring. This they traversed, and presently came to another flight of steps rising upward.

"We shall soon be in the open air," said Morse.

But in this they were disappointed, for they walked on and on for a good half-mile or more, and still there was no termination to that underground way.

The ventilation was all that could be desired, and they experienced no difficulty in breathing, such as might have been looked for.

As they walked they chatted freely, their voices being taken up by the acoustic properties of the place, carried away, and brought back again in a way that was inclined to make talking a mixture.

Something Romeo said raised a laugh, and the hearty ring of it reverberated again and again until it died away to a murmur as soft as the lapping of the sea at night when the wind has fallen to nothing. But as it was on the point of dying out it seemed to rise again with a force not very great in itself, but under the circumstances startling.

"I don't understand that," said Changeling.

"I do," quietly replied Morse. "There is somebody on ahead. They have heard our voices, and forget that theirs can be conveyed to us."

"That's it!" cried Changeling, smiting his thigh.

Both the words and the blow found an echo, and Morse cautioned him about speaking so loudly. Again they proceeded onward, keeping an absolute silence with their tongues, their footfalls alone making any sound, until they were all startled and suddenly pulled up short by a stern voice crying out:

"Stand, or we shoot!"

They could see no one, and as they pulled up the command was followed by a burst of laughter. More and more astonished, they remained transfixed and staring at each other.

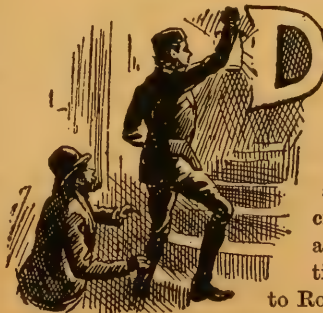
The echoing laughter died away, and again the voice was heard. This time it was recognised.

"Well met, Morse. We have found a way in and out between us."

It was Dawson who came forward, with a smile on his face and his rifle over his shoulder.

CHAPTER CCLXXXV.

CLEARING THE GREAT VAULT.



IBBLE also came into the region of the light cast by the lantern ere Morse could speak to Dawson, and then the explanations were made, exciting much allround astonishment, particularly with regard to Romeo, whose mind was not constituted to bear an overwhelming mass of mystery.

"We are not far from the flight of steps," remarked

Dawson, when the details of their adventures were given. "Dibble came down in a hurry, and he says the way is short. I reckon there are about a hundred steps."

"We hadn't a lantern with us," added Dibble, "and were just thinking how far it would be safe to travel in the dark, when we heard your voices."

"Who fired the rifle?" asked Morse.

"I did," answered Dawson, modestly. "It was an accident. Dibble came bodily down, rolling nearly the whole way before he could make up his mind to stop. I contented myself with sending on my rifle to let him know I was coming."

They agreed to return by the shortest route, which was the way Dawson and Dibble came, and ascended to the open air by the flight of stone steps, which were remarkably straight and steep when their number is considered.

The road back was as clear to them as a highway, and eventually they arrived at the camp the last of all. It was now well on in the afternoon, and they were met by Jim, whose face was indicative of the feelings of the rest.

"In the name of fortune," he asked, "how is it you have met?"

"We met on the Chorker Road," said Morse. "Particulars will be given when we have had tea."

Jim had his item of intelligence. It related to Fornshaw, the renegade, who was lying wounded in the tent where Charley had kept guard over Chorker.

It seemed that the bear had struck down the stranger with his paw, but refrained from killing him.

The blow was a terrible one, and the fact could not be concealed that it might end fatally.

"I don't know the particulars," said Jim, "for we found the man senseless, and Chorker says he knows nothing about it. He was struck on the forehead, and I suppose it is a case of concussion of the brain. He has not spoken rationally since, but talks of his past life and his old home, in a raving fashion. It is pitiful."

"What was Chorker doing in our tent?" asked Morse.

Jim shrugged his shoulders.

"Up to no good," he answered. "He says that Charley dragged him there, but stands convicted by the fact that his clothing has not suffered."

As most of the boys had but just returned, an early tea was voted, and the preparations went merrily on. Pending Morse's explanation of the day's adventure Romeo was questioned, but could give no clear account of anything.

"It 'bout de sort ob ting ginerally," he said, "dat you sperience after eating de bes' part ob a sucking-pig, and go to bed right away."

They could understand what he meant, although

none of them had attempted the gastronomical feat which Romeo must have personally accomplished. Unable to give them the details of the day, he was soon left to assist his father and grandfather, who likewise were consumed with curiosity.

With them Romeo did not hesitate to enter most needlessly into the region of Romance, and the general bearing of his revelations may be inferred from our giving one item.

"Down in dat vault," he said, "inside dat big copper biler we foun' 'bout five hundred golden crowns covered wif jewels, so dat you not able to see de metal dey was made of."

"How do you know dey was gold, den?" asked Macbeth, cunningly.

"Marse Morse 'sponsible for de statement," replied Romeo; "mebbe he guess by de weight ob de crowns. Anyway, dere dey was all in a heap, jes' as you would chuck taters into de shed at de gatherin' time. Underneath dem we come up 'bout seven hundred bushel ob pure diamonds not set in anything, and some on 'em 'bout de size ob an orange."

This will perhaps suffice as a sample, and notwithstanding that as a romancist he had more than once been found out, his story was now implicitly believed.

As a concluding touch, he informed his delighted relatives that all were to share in the treasure-trove, and he reckoned that they would have the value of a million and a half apiece.

No wonder then that such assistance as he gave his relatives was of the most perfunctory description. Indeed, they felt that the bearer of such good tidings deserved a time of ease and good living.

Meanwhile, Chorker, released from his captivity, heard that the way of his escape was known. The one mystery of his life, the only means of creating interest in himself, was gone, and he strove in vain to pooh-pooh it.

"There must be two ways out," he asserted, "and mine is the t'other. There was something mighty cur'us about it, I can tell you."

But he was laughed to scorn, and was desired to sit apart, as he had done in the old days of his disgrace.

Miss Elegantine, after a most successful day in the woods, returned laden vicariously with all sorts of botanical burdens. Her vicar was, of course, the resentful Napoleon Farrell.

She promptly offered her services as nurse to Fornshaw, the renegade, and they were accepted. Women are instinctively good nurses.

Jim and his fellow-occupants of the tent gave it up to the patient and his nurse. All that evening the wits of the injured Fornshaw were astray, and the last report of the night was, "Not himself yet."

As Miss Elegantine delivered her message, Jim, who was the final inquirer, noticed something peculiar in her manner. It was a sort of constraint, as if she had some trouble on her mind.

He asked her if she felt unwell, and her answer was that she was well as usual. He thought no more of it at the time, but later on he recalled her strangely suppressed way of answering him.

During the evening the discovery in the vault was made known to the whole camp, save Macbeth and Romeo, who were busy with their own affairs, talked of the wondrous revelations of the unvarnished Romeo, and what they would do with their riches by-and-by.

Morse was for clearing the vault at once, but not by hauling everything up through the Hall of Justice.

"We must do it in a quicker and smarter way," he said to Jim; "it is easy enough; I think I can fix on a spot that is pretty near being overhead of the storehouse. Then we can break a hole through, fix up a hoisting-gear, and with a working party above and below, we shall soon get the task done."

"Suppose," said Jim, "in breaking through, the roof should suddenly give way? What of the fellows at work above it?"

"The roof," replied Morse, "is of stone. If inclined to give way, it would have done so long ago. All I ask is for a party to dig down to it, and leave the rest to me."

"You will find all here very willing to help you."

So Morse was up early in the morning—he and Jim slept in one of the other tents—and away to the city. He must have already calculated the spot for the digging, as he went straight on to a street to the right of the Hall of Justice and fixed on the centre of it.

There was no paving, but the roadway was formed of earth that had been beaten very hard, and the digging would anyway be stiff work.

With a piece of stick he described a circle about twelve feet in diameter, and hastened back. Jim had already harangued the boys on the subject of assisting Morse, and every available pick and spade had a hand to use it.

With two parties of workers of ten each, he by-and-by returned to the street and set them to work. In twos and threes the others struggled up to play the part of spectators.

Martin, Changeling, and Sleery were busy getting together the materials for a derrick, with Chorker as light porter; which means that they made him do a lot of heavy work.

The crust in the street was thinner than Morse expected. It was about seven feet through it, and before noon the ring of a pick wielded by Felton striking on stone showed that the goal of the diggers had been reached.

Morse, who was near, superintending the proceedings, gave the word for "spades only," and in a quarter of an hour a portion of the roof of that wondrous vault was laid bare.

There was a thin seam visible between the stones, but no method of fastening.

When all was ready Morse bade the diggers come out, and descended himself with a drill in his hand. With this he made a hole in the solid stone, and inserted a long slender cartridge about the thickness of a lead-pencil.

Attaching a fuse, he bade the boys get away to a safe distance.

"A hundred yards will suffice," he said. "I have timed the fuse for three minutes' burning."

They did not pause to see him light it, having a wholesome dread of the power of his explosives. So they hurried down to the bottom of the street, and on turning saw him calmly following them.

Three minutes is not long to wait, unless under very peculiar circumstances. But it seemed to be more to the waiting group, when the now familiar sharp crack was heard, and a cloud of dust rose slowly in the air.

"It is done," said Morse, in his quietly satisfied way. "Stay here, while I go up alone to see how the powder has acted."

He did not tell them that it was possible more than the stone in the immediate neighbourhood of their digging might be loosened, and so make the street unsafe; but that was thought of by his precautionary mind, and as he strolled up quietly he carefully examined the roadway.

It was intact until he came close to the scene of their recent labours, and then he saw that his blasting had been very effectual. Around the hole there were several short cracks, and all the visible stone below had been sent down into the vault.

CHAPTER CCLXXVI.

THE CONTENTS OF THE BALES.



THE next thing to be done was to fix the derrick, which would be the work of the men under the guidance of Sleery. Johnny Daw, who had a sailor's knack of rope-tying, was also desired to given them a hand.

Morse went down to where they were working, gave them all necessary

instructions, especially warning them not to go too near the opening, and to work as mountain climbers do, tied together by a rope in case of a slip or a fall, and then alone set out for the vault.

He took no lantern with him, as he considered that there would be light enough let in to guide him, and so it proved; for when his eyes became accustomed to the gloom immediately around him, as he slipped cautiously down the stairway, he could see in the distance a shaft of bright light between two rows of pillars and a diffusion of it around that was all he required.

He approached the spot, and stood almost immediately over the opening, which he judged was about a hundred feet above him.

In his calculations concerning the position of the storehouse he was about the same distance out, but considering that he had drawn his conclusion from a mental calculation only, without the aid of any sort of instrument, or by measurement, it may be put down as a very creditable performance.

The question of the rope came in, and he decided on utilising the wire cords about some of the bales. It could be quickly removed, conveyed above, and twisted into the required substance there.

So he returned to his companions, and secured more help from them. In the afternoon a quantity of wood was carried up to the street, and pitched through the opening to the vault below.

A fire would now be safe, for the smoke could escape, and the use of candles, of which there was a shortened quantity in stock, avoided.

The construction of the derrick was going on, and with a strong pulley, of Martin's making, it was hoped that it would be ready by nightfall.

The work of hoisting up could then begin on the morrow.

The majority of the bales and boxes could retain their cording, while the goods taken from those necessarily deprived of it were to be hoisted in roughly-made sacks of the material in which so many of the goods and chattels of the ancient people had been stored away.

Morse arranged it all, setting his assistants to work by the light of a blazing fire, attended by Romeo; and surely never was there a more weird or a stranger scene.

As the topmost bales were rolled down, the cylinder gradually rose up until it was twenty feet from the ground. There it stopped, having reached something connected with its construction that prevented its going any higher.

"Get everything outside as soon as you can," was the command of Morse.

Jim was not there. He remained in the camp with Macbeth, Mr. Farrell, and Hamlet. Miss Elegantine

and her patient perforce were there. All the rest were in the street, above with the derrick makers, or below with Morse as workers.

By sunset the rope was made, although there still remained a few bales to be removed from the storehouse. They were at the base of the pile, and larger than the rest. Morse said he would get the men to clear them out on the morrow.

The next day all but Jim Gordon and Mr. Farrell were again upon the scene, some above, and others below. The derrick was in working order, and the hauling up began at an early hour.

By the direction of Morse everything was conveyed to the Hall of Justice, and there the bales were placed around. With Ganthony and Terry as assistants, he opened the packages as they arrived, and the varied assortment of articles disclosed amazed them.

Little doubt could now be entertained but that Morse was right in his conjecture. The inhabitants of the city, prior to leaving, packed such things as they were unable to take with them, and they were stored below.

Whatever the object may have been must for ever be a mystery, but the signs of use on the majority of articles disclosed was indisputable evidence that Morse was right.

In addition to articles of wear, of the finest materials, there were found knives for domestic use, spoons, plates, dishes, jugs, and so on, of various metals. Bronze appeared to have been more generally employed, but gold and silver were not lacking.

There was likewise an assortment of quaint jewellery, curiously-framed looking-glasses of polished metal, inlaid small boxes, and other things too numerous to mention, the whole forming a unique and practically invaluable collection of rarities.

"First of all," said Morse, "we will sort them out into groups of similar articles, so as to get an idea of the whole."

"We shall want a ship to carry them home," exclaimed Terry, enthusiastically.

"Not the whole of it," quietly answered Morse.

Later on he had an interview with Martin and Sleery as they rested from their labours at noon. For the transport of the goods across the island more sledges would be required, and he desired them, when the hauling up was finished, to get on with the work with all possible speed.

Suddenly he had come to the conclusion that the sooner all these valuable things were conveyed out of the reach of marauders, whether on their own account or authorised by any governing body, the better.

Late in the afternoon Mr. Farrell sauntered up and surveyed the wonderful collection. He remained there while daylight lasted, and returned with the boys to their tents when night had fallen, making

little comment on the find; but he was very thoughtful for hours afterwards. Indeed, the dawn was at hand when he finally fell into a fitful sleep.

CHAPTER CCLXXVII.

MISS ELEGANTINE ASTONISHES JIM GORDON.



WHILE these things were being done there had been no change in the condition of Fornshaw, the renegade. During the day Miss Elegantine assiduously looked to his wants, and Jim remained in the camp in case he should be wanted.

He had no definite idea as to how he could be of service, but was vaguely conscious of some impending revelation concerning the renegade.

Prior to going to rest, he went into the tent and found Miss Elegantine at her post. The sick and wounded man was calmly sleeping. This was a good sign.

"He seems better," Jim remarked.

"He is very weak," responded the grim old maid.

Her manner, even her voice, was completely changed. She appeared to be quite another woman, softer in speech, and more womanly altogether.

"You will come for me if you require anything in the night?" said Jim.

"We have all that is needed here," she said.

"I mean if he awakes to consciousness."

"Even then you could do nothing."

"He knows me," said Jim, "and you are a stranger to him."

"Ah! I did not think of that," returned the woman softly.

Jim went away to the tent where he had taken up his quarters, and found the tired boys who shared it with him already asleep. Not one of them required the least rocking.

Jim did not so readily find repose. He had done little during the day, and furthermore his mind was busy with vague, half-defined thoughts. He found himself mixing up Miss Elegantine with Fornshaw in the most unaccountable manner.

By-and-by things got hazy, and he was sinking off, when Miss Elegantine, with a lamp in her hand, parted the folds of the tent and looked in. She espied him instantly, and he awoke ere she could say a word.

"You want me?" he said.

"He is conscious," she replied, "and has asked for you."

"I will be with him in a few minutes," said Jim.

She went away, and Jim speedily put on the clothing he had removed when he lay down. He discovered that he had unconsciously only partly undressed himself, as if he expected to be called up in a hurry.

Slipping out quietly, he left the tent. Charley, the bear, was outside, and caressed him by rubbing his black, cold nose against his hand.

The animal would have followed him, but he bade him keep back.

"You cannot expect to be a welcome visitor, Charley," he said.

The bear whined softly and stole away. Jim went on to the tent, open ready to receive him.

He entered, and his eyes took in a scene that was astonishing to him at a glance.

The renegade was lying thoughtfully gazing at the softened features of his nurse. In his hand rested one of hers.

On perceiving Jim, the face of the renegade lighted up with a glad smile, and he addressed the boy by his Christian name.

"Jim, this is kind of you."

"It is nothing," replied Jim, as he took the free hand of the renegade. "I am more than pleased to see you are better."

"I am better," answered the renegade, adding, after a pause, "in some things. My nurse has been telling me some wonderful things about you."

"Which is more than I deserve perhaps," answered Jim, with a smile.

"Before I go into other matters that may interest you," said the renegade, "I wish to exonerate the author of my injuries. It was I who sought to do him a mischief at the outset. I was not aware that the bear was tame, and when it came up to me, as I now believe, in a friendly spirit, I drew my dagger, intending to kill it if I could. It was then that swiftly as a stroke of lightning his paw struck me down. I recognise now that if Charley, as you call the creature, had been vicious, I should not be talking to you at this moment."

"You cannot tell how relieved I am to hear this," said Jim. "Charley is one of my pets, and although he has more than once dealt roughly with our enemies, it would pain me inexpressibly if he injured one of our friends."

"You look upon me as a friend?"

"I do, and have done so ever since we met that day."

"Gordon," said Miss Elegantine, "let me have a word now. Would you think for a moment that I ever had a lover?"

"I do not see why you should not have had one in your younger days," replied Jim, honestly enough.

"She had one," said the renegade, "and he lies here."

The expression on Jim's face was a study. Miss Elegantine smiled sadly.

"I am a living illustration," she said, "of how we may be changed by time and circumstances. It is well for the young to know this, although I pray that you may never be so completely changed as I am."

"When I first knew her," said the renegade, "she was a tall, graceful woman, handsome——"

"Oh, Reginald!" she interposed.

"Is this the time for idle flattery?" he asked. "No! Jim, she was all I have said, and I loved her; but I was a worthless dog, inasmuch that I led a reckless life, mixed up with men who robbed me of my patrimony and left me a ruined man."

"Let it all be forgotten," she urged.

"Let me speak to the boy while I have the strength," said the renegade. "He has the makings of a noble man in him, and it is such high natures that are the more powerfully tempted to go wrong. As he is, so was I, strong in some respects, but perhaps weak in others. More especially in giving his whole heart to his friends, let him beware lest he find false ones, as I did."

More and more amazed by the unexpected revelations imparted to him, Jim looked alternately from one to the other. Was it possible that the woman whom he had deemed to be so hard, and almost harsh in her dealings with others, could ever have been a charming, lovable woman? But he had the word of one who ought to know, and to doubt was to be unjust.

"I need not give you my whole story—and, indeed, I cannot, for I have not the strength," pursued the renegade. "Suffice it, then, if I tell you that, deceived and robbed by the friends I trusted, I lost all faith in the world, even in her I professed to love, and, without one word of adieu, I turned my back upon all I knew, and sought a new life in a strange land and among an almost savage people. In the fierce conflict of the desert, and weird existence of the Ouram people, I found a vent for the bitterness within me. But I left one embittered behind me."

"Say no more," said Miss Elegantine.

"Let him know that my leaving you as I did was the cause of your after bitterness. You thought until to-night that I had merely heartlessly deserted you, and so the evil worked on us both. But we know the truth now, and I can die content."

"You will not die, surely," said Jim, with a choking feeling in his throat.

"Will there ever be a more fitting time?" asked the renegade, softly. "Jim, I have lived among a people who *know* when their hour has come, even though it may seem to others that they have many

years of life before them. The fires that have burned within me are dying out. While exhausting themselves they have consumed me. Do not grieve, lad, it is better that the end should be *here*. Give me your hand again."

Jim held it out, and the dying renegade took it between his own, holding it tenderly, and yet, as Jim could tell, by a fast-weakening grasp.

"Whatever good there may be in the blessing of a dying man," he said, "may it rest upon your head. Brave you are, and honourable and true. That you may remain so is my dying wish. Now kiss me on the cheek once, and leave us."

Jim bent over the dying man and touched his cheek with his lips. In turn the renegade saluted him, and the chill of his lips thrilled Jim with a sympathetic pain.

"Good-bye, Jim," said the renegade.

"Good-bye," answered Jim, chokingly. "I—I——"

"You do not know my name. It is better unknown. Let it remain, as it must have done these many years, forgotten by the world. Once more, good-bye!"

Jim could only answer him with a light movement of the hand, and then he left the tent.

He heard the folds of it softly fall as Miss Elegantine closed it, shutting out all view of the last sad scene of the strange drama of her life.

Jim, instead of returning to his own tent, walked away up the slope, and sat down half-way between the camp and the wood.

Above was the beautifully familiar sky with its refulgent stars. Below, above, and all around him there was the hush of a peerless, calm night. It had upon it a still expectancy, like that of a grief-stricken man waiting with bated breath for the tidings of some direful loss. Jim fought to keep back the tears in vain.

And yet he knew so little of the man who was on the verge of dissolution! There must have been something akin in their natures, and in Jim's mind there arose a dread questioning:

"He was like me. Shall I ever in the far-off future meet with such a fate as his?"

Jim was not wise in a worldly sense, but he knew enough to know that the changes and chances of life are many. The blossom, however beautiful, does not always bring forth good fruit. Nay, more, even when the fruit is formed, and is fair to the eye, how often is the cankering worm at the core of it!

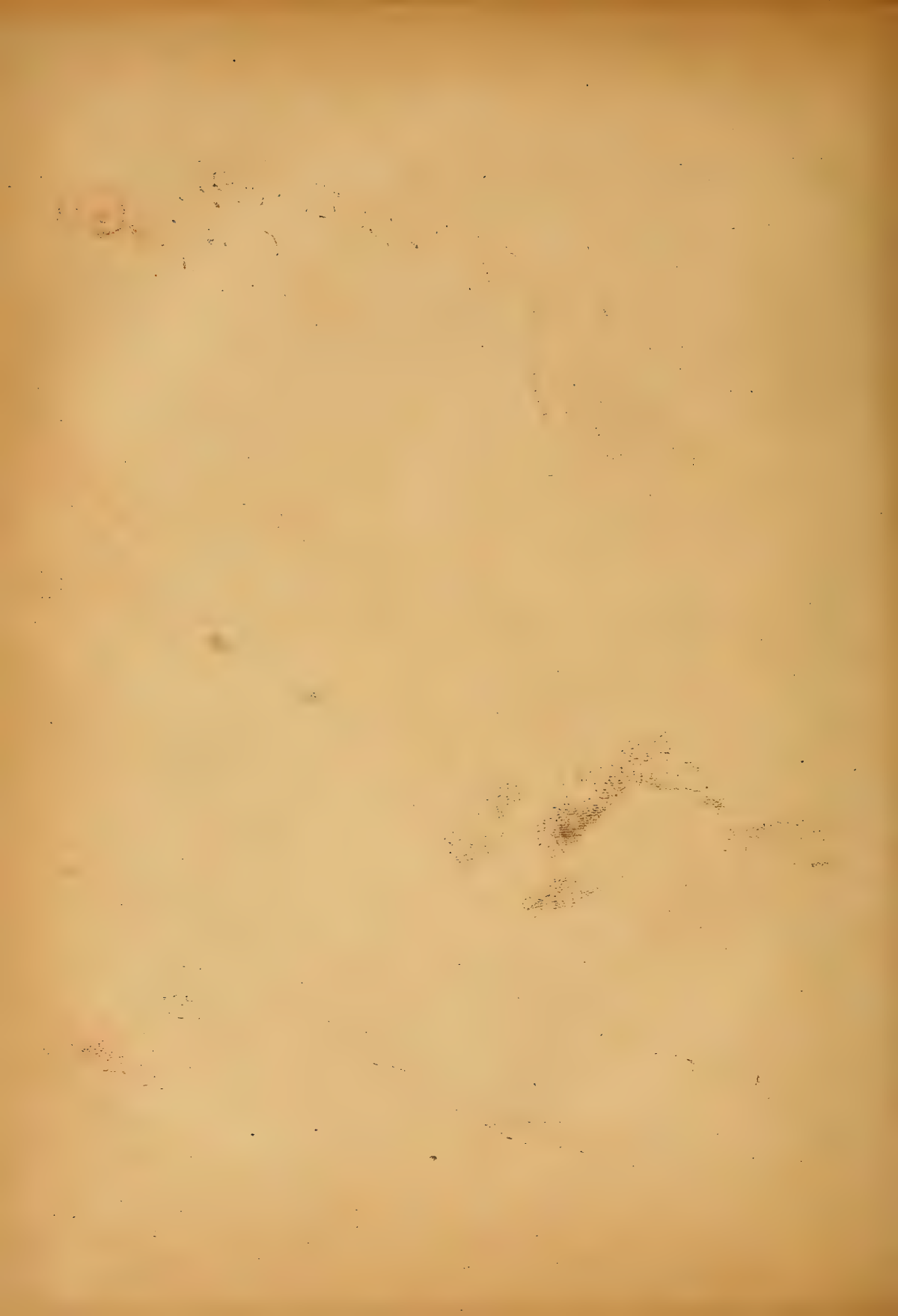
That was the line of thought, new to him, which kept him there for an hour or more, and then, with his strong, resolute nature awakened fully to the responsibilities of life, he walked softly back to his tent, where he happily found a speedy coming of repose.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.

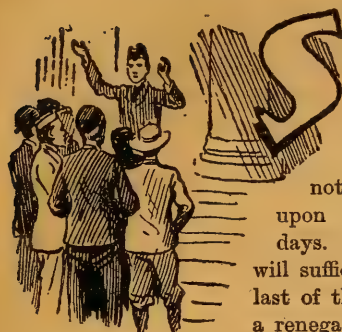


The dismayed author of the deed gasped for breath. "As I'm a living sinner," groaned Chorker, "I've killed him!"



CHAPTER CCLXXVIII.

THE GORDONTOWN LOTTERY.



SCENES of sadness are not good to dwell upon. They ought to be rare in the lives of the young, and we will not therefore dwell upon the following two days. A very few words will suffice as a record of the last of the man who, though a renegade, had many noble qualities. His erring was the action of an impulsive nature violently disturbed by wrong done by others.

On the morning after the night when he took his touching farewell of Jim, Miss Elegantine announced that the end came just before daylight, and that it was the wish of the dead man that he should be buried in some unfrequented spot with only a plain cross to mark his resting-place.

The subdued bearing of the woman gave her a grace and dignity that none save Jim had marked in her before. To Dibble, who as yet knew nothing of her sad story, it was a revelation.

"I can hardly believe it is my aunt," he said to Jim.

"She is a better woman than we thought her to be," replied Jim. "You and I may change one day."

Sleery made a rough coffin during the day, and at eve the renegade was buried in the wood, well out of the beaten track. The next day the cross, made substantially by Martin of two bars of bronze, was fixed over the grave. Then the old life was resumed, and busy scenes in and around the Hall of Justice diverted the minds of all, save two, from the melancholy affair.

When the entire contents of the old storehouse had been transferred to the hall, Morse called a meeting, which was attended by all except Miss Elegantine.

Though unostentatious in her mourning, she could take no part in the joyous life around her.

As Morse announced that he had something to say that was of interest to all, there were no absentees. The place of meeting was outside the hall, from the steps of which he proposed to address them.

Now, Macbeth and Hamlet hitherto had seen nothing, or very little, of the contents of the bales. They still had the crowns so heavily jewelled and the cartloads of loose diamonds in their mind's eye.

Great, therefore, was their surprise when Morse proceeded to give an account of the nature and extent

of the find, and deep was their anger against the romancing Romeo.

"A sort ob lumrous idea come ober me," murmured Macbeth, "dat de boy am a bit ob a liar."

"If eber he had de trufe in him," returned Hamlet, wrathfully, "it 'pears to me dat he hab lorse it."

Morse had a plan for the disposal of his acquired property—in one sense it was rightfully his—that met with enthusiastic approval.

It was that the entire stock should be divided into lots and numbered. Tickets bearing corresponding numbers were to be drawn, and each take his chance of the contents of his prize-pocket.

"In short," said Morse, "I suggest having a Gordontown lottery. I will not disguise from you that all will not have equal value, and that the biggest may not be invariably reckoned as the best; but as I shall take my chance with the rest, you cannot grumble at what you get."

Nobody was to be left out, even Chorker was included, and the drawing was to take place in a few days, as a little time was needed to get ready for it.

Morse wanted but two assistants, and his suggestion that they should be Jim and Martin was accepted with acclamation.

It is a common love of the uncertain that makes us all have a sneaking kindness for such simple, honest lotteries as was here arranged. It was a case of all prizes, no blanks, and nothing to pay; but the mere fact that there was to be some difference in the value of the prizes gave a zest to it.

Thus was the day of the drawing looked forward to with pleasure by all except Macbeth and Hamlet, who felt that they had been imposed upon by one of their own flesh and blood.

"Whar you golden crowns cobered all ober wif jewels?" demanded Macbeth.

"And where dem piled-up sackfuls ob loose diamonds?" asked Hamlet.

They had him in a corner, but Romeo was not flustered.

"Whar am dey?" he cried. "How I know?"

"Dey neber was in existerence," asserted Macbeth.

"In course, you know," remarked Romeo, sarcastically; "but you pay pretty smart for kicking up all dis bobbbery. Dey not like it."

"Who am dey?" inquired Macbeth.

"De ghostesses in de vaults what change de t'ings," replied Romeo.

"Blow your ghosts," grunted Hamlet; "dey neber was in existerence."

"All right," asserted Romeo; "you see."

"Bring him 'long dis way," cried Macbeth, defiantly. "Who 'fraid ob de muck?"

It was night when this little family disturbance took place, and the three niggers were squatting by

the ashes of a fire, more from habit than for warmth. The majority of the other members of the camp were strolling about, and only a few were near. "You call my ghostesses muck!" almost yelled Romeo.

"Yes," insisted Macbeth; "bring dem 'long dis minute."

"Dey all rubbage," said Hamlet. "Tin dollies. Moral waxwork!"

Romeo declined to discuss the matter further, but refilling his pipe, smoked on as one who has done his duty by warning evil-doers, and now must leave them to take the consequences.

The next two days were spent busily making sledges and arranging other means of transport; for a return to the region of the chine was decided on. Jim and Morse, having had a private talk together, thought that as the summer drew towards its end the majority of the boys ought to go home. The fact was that a proportion of them were anxious to get back to astonish their friends with the story of their adventures.

Perhaps Jim and Morse, too, would not have been averse to the change, although they felt that if nothing untoward happened they would one day return to the island.

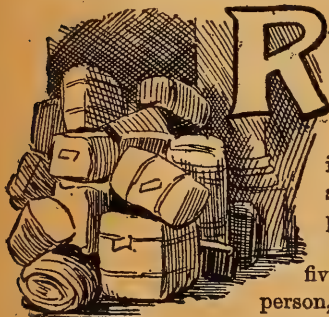
There was talk, too, of Giuseppe's return with a hoped-for mail, which might bring them tidings of their home people, and possibly a statement of the cause of the three fathers, who were to act as a deputation, not arriving. And last, but not least, the other side of the island was in a way their home.

Thus for many reasons were they all longing to get away from the old mysterious city in which they had experienced so many startling adventures.

In due time the arrangements for the Gordontown lottery were completed, and one evening Morse announced that the drawing would take place on the morrow.

CHAPTER CCLXXIX.

DRAWING THE PRIZES.—THE LUCK OF CHORKER.



RANGED round the outer hall of the Temple of Justice were a number of packages, varying in size, but all sufficiently bulky to please the eye.

There were sixty-five in all, one for each person, and all duly marked with figures ranging from one to the highest figure. In a bag was placed the same number of small pieces of wood, also marked in the

same way. One ticket, and one parcel each for every-one.

Miss Elegantine laid aside her sorrow, and in sheer good feeling came up with the rest to attend the grand ceremony. She only stipulated that her nephew, Oscar Dibble, should draw for her.

Mr. Farrell stood a little apart from the rest, with his arms folded, on the true Napoleonic principle. Morse, with the bag, came out, and was about to begin distributing the tickets, when the voice of the school-master was heard.

"I forbid this foolery," he said, loudly and authoritatively.

The boys ceased their chattering, and every eye was fixed upon the strange figure with the white hair, spare form, and frowning face.

"You forbid it, sir?" said Morse.

"I do."

"On what grounds?"

"That all which has been found here is *mine*!"

"Stuff!" cried a dozen voices. "Go on, Morse."

"I rent this island from the Spanish authorities," continued Mr. Farrell, "and all on it for the time belongs to *me*."

"You forget, sir," said Gordon, quietly, "that you in turn abandoned your position as the head of us, and we are free agents; what we find belongs to us, and not to you."

"I decline to take any part in the affair," said Mr. Farrell, haughtily; "as for your right or mine to it, that will be settled elsewhere."

With this threat on his lips he wheeled about, and walking down the square, vanished from sight.

"Troublesome always," said Morse; "but I for one do not fear what he can do. Draw your tickets, boys. The last left in the bag will belong to Napoleon Farrell."

There was perfect order in the drawing. On taking a ticket from the bag the holder stood aside, and the others one by one ranged themselves behind him. When the drawing was over, the distribution began.

This was done in a very simple and effective way.

Morse took the tickets at the door, and handed them in one by one to Martin and Changeling, who acted as porters for the occasion.

In turn they brought the bales or packages to the lucky winners and handed them over. To save confusion, each holder wrote his name with a pencil on both tickets, and the sledges having been brought up, the whole stock was conveyed by degrees to the tents below.

As everything had been securely packed, Morse advised the boys to restrain their curiosity and not open their prizes until they crossed the island.

Chorker was very dissatisfied. He had drawn the number of a small package, if it was not the smallest

of all. Something more bulky would have been acceptable to him.

Morse, on the other hand, had gained one of the largest. He accepted it with composure, and was seemingly more than satisfied.

"We might ha' knowed it," Chorker said to Martin; "them as puts the things up knows where to lay their hands on the best."

"I'll change with you," said a quiet voice behind him.

Morse was there, and had overheard the grumbling of the dissatisfied one, who was of opinion that Morse did not mean what he said, but was simply bent on shaming him. As Chorker could not be shamed where profit was concerned, he promptly closed with the offer.

"Now, you will understand," said Morse, sternly, "that you were the winner of the first prize. The contents of this small package are worth forty times the value of the larger. I will prove it to you one day. Away with you for a greedy dog!"

It was seldom that Morse was wrathful in his bearing, but he was so on this occasion. Chorker was taken aback by the change in him, as he spoke in clear, cutting tones, his eyes flashing, and one of his hands angrily sweeping away the offender.

Moreover, Chorker felt that he had as usual blundered egregiously, and he groaned in spirit as he rolled away the exchange bale.

"Jist my luck," he muttered; "nuthin' comes off fair and square with me."

One thing more now remained for Morse to satisfy his mind upon, and that was why the walls of the city had been built hollow.

It was his nature not to be satisfied with anything in part. He pursued all investigations right through, leaving nothing unturned to make the result satisfying. As it would take two days for the completion of the preparations to leave that part of the island, Morse resolved to give the time to seeking a solution of the matter.

He knew that when the city was built there was no stinting of labour or material, and the hollow walls were a matter of design and expediency.

Jim Gordon said he was not interested. He thought that they had discovered everything worth looking for. Morse was of a different opinion, and spent the day down by the spot where the followers of Oka Wallah had found a way through the wall.

He discovered nothing but a walled-up space that extended to the right and left for a few feet, and in vain did he search elsewhere for some means of examining the rest of the interior.

Finally, he resolved to fall back upon his old medium, one of his explosives, of which he still had a considerable quantity stored away.

As it was hardly the thing to carry about unless it was necessary to do so, he decided to use it all, and have a grand blow-up on the morrow.

"It will be a sort of parting flare-up," he remarked to Jim, as they discussed the subject that night.

"All right," answered Jim, "just as you please. Only don't, as a final touch to your display, do any mischief to yourself."

"I have fixed on the spot where Terry and I went up that day," said Morse; "it seems to me to be the strongest and stoutest part of the whole wall. It will be a trial of strength between ancient building work and the discoveries of a modern chemical compound."

"You intend to make a big affair of it, then?"

"I do; and to prevent accidents with any of the boys, I shall wait until you have shifted everything up to the wood. The fuse will be a long one, so that I shall also be able to get away and see the effect at a distance."

"I wish you would make it long enough so as to be up with us when the blow-up takes place."

"If it will be more satisfactory to you, I am willing."

"Well, you know, Morse, that, without being nervous, I feel as one does who sees a terrific agency he cannot understand at work. You tell me that you are going to use all you have left of this explosive, and that it will be to yourself a matter of speculation——"

"In a measure, Jim."

"In a measure, then. Knowing this, I would rather that you ran no risk, but came away to a place of safety. You consider it necessary for us, and I look upon it as necessary for you."

"Very good," said Morse; "I don't object. Indeed, I feel your kind interest in my safety. I will arrange so as to be with you when the racket takes place. From the top of the slope we shall have a splendid view of it."

Jim was satisfied. Morse was much too precious to him as a friend to allow him to run any needless risk, and although he did not say so, he felt a presentiment that the morrow would bring about an unexpected catastrophe.

As with many of us, he was somewhat ashamed of any feeling approaching superstition. The world grows more critical on this point every day, and the fashion is to laugh at everything that cannot be reasoned out and proved as a material fact.

Therefore did Jim maintain a silence on the feeling within him, and rested content with the promise given by Morse.



CHAPTER CCLXXX.

MORSE'S MONSTER BLOW-UP.



PERHAPS there are no sights more popular among young and old than those which have their origin in explosive powers.

Gunpowder was the first to lay hold of the public mind and hold its sway undisputed as king of effect producers for centuries. It has been, in a degree,

superseded by more violent agencies, but it is not yet relegated to the region of the despised.

The boom of the big guns on the battle-field long held its own as one of the most awe-inspiring sounds heard on earth. Certainly it had no peer in the category of man-created things.

The crack of the rifle in a lesser degree had its terror-inspiring power, and so through the list, including the revolver, now so much in vogue.

When it became known that Morse would excel himself in the work of the morrow, the camp passed a restless hour or two ere retiring to rest.

The boys had seen so much that was startling and wonderful brought about by his hands, that they naturally looked forward to the morrow with the keenest interest.

"He reckons," said Terry, "that he will shift a hundred feet of the wall, which, I consider, will be about equivalent to blowing St. Paul's across the Thames."

He sat, with a circle of his companions, by Romeo's cooking-fire, now reduced to a few ashes. The three niggers stood near, listening with both ears and eyes, if one might judge by the strained stare in the latter.

"Of course, you know to an ounce how much he will shift!" returned Dibble, sarcastically.

"Terry once distinguished himself as an artillerist," remarked Ganthony.

Terry smiled dryly, and threw a clod of earth into the ashes.

"I know what Morse tells me," he said, "and if you think he is bragging, go and sit upon the top of the wall to-morrow and laugh at him when he fails on the job."

"Dat 'bout de soundes' bit ob advice me hear for a munt," said Romeo.

"Nobody doubts that Morse can do anything, almost," said Dibble, "and he never brags. What I objected to was your pretending to know what would

be done, Terry. I haven't the least doubt but that it will be worth seeing."

"Dere am one comfort in it," said Macbeth. "Marse Morse get rid ob dat confuious stuff, an' de chance ob a blow-up among us am rejuiced to a millennium."

"He means minimum," said Terry; "but it doesn't matter. By the way, I offered my help to Morse——"

"Goodness!—what cheek!" grunted Dawson.

"He selected Martin," continued Terry, "and they will be off as soon as there is daylight to see to work."

"Which suggests to us," said Trimmer, "that we had better be up early and shift our quarters as soon as possible. Accidents happen with the best-regulated explosives, you know."

Somehow the presentiment felt by Jim was in the breasts of many, and the idea of an early shifting in the morning was a very general one.

Thus it fell out that even before there was light enough to see in the morning many were up and preparing to move.

With the first ray of sun Morse and Martin departed, taking with them a couple of picks, and a drill for cutting a hole in the stone wall.

Such breakfast as they needed they carried in the old way, in a linen bag slung about their shoulders.

There was no time lost by the inhabitants in the camp in getting everything up to the wood.

Practically, the greater part of the preparations had been made the night before. The sledges, ready loaded, were hauled up, and the tents being struck, it was deputed to the three negroes and Changeling to carry them.

Chorker also assisted, and, the tents proving extraordinarily light for their size, owing to the material being mainly of silk, this was not a very arduous task.

Mr. Farrell declined to assist, and as he was not at all fit for manual labour, his weakness remaining with him, no objection was made to his taking things easy.

Jim and Miss Elegantine had the doubtful pleasure of his company, as they strolled up together. Both were anxious about this, the latest attempt of Morse to display the might of his manufactures.

"I feel as if something was going to happen," said Miss Elegantine. "It came over me last night, when I saw you and Morse talking together, and it kept me awake a long time. This morning, as soon as I was awake, it returned to me again."

Jim admitted having entertained a similar apprehension. Mr. Farrell struck in with his opinion of it.

"Mere superstition," he said, "born with a weak spirit. If anything does happen, Morse will only have himself to thank. There is no danger with the most violent explosives, if they are properly handled."

"I am glad you think so," returned Jim, coldly, "for

Morse handles such things with the knowledge of an expert. He is both cool and careful."

In front of their goods and chattels the boys and men were ranged in an expectant mood. Morse had been gone over three hours, and the time for the blowing-up of the wall could not be far off.

Half-an-hour passed away in subdued conversation, with the one theme for its subject. Then, to Jim's great gratification, he saw Morse and his companion, Martin, emerge from one of the city gates. They were walking quickly, but without any show of alarm.

The two amateur sappers came up, carrying their tools on their shoulders. An earnest conversation was going on between them.

"Morse is of opinion," said Martin, "that the vault extends on that side beyond the city walls, and that the wall we have prepared for blasting goes down solid to the flooring below."

"I judge it is so," said Morse, "by the fact that there were no footings, as builders call it, to the wall at that spot. I was curious on the matter, and on digging a few yards above and below, we found them a few inches under the surface."

"How deeply did you dig?" inquired Jim; "at the selected spot, I mean."

"Ten feet," replied Morse, "and the wall went sheer down. At that depth we drilled the hole and placed the blasting-powder. The lower it is the more effective its lifting power."

"And the fuse?" inquired Jim.

"It will be burnt out in ten minutes' time," replied Morse, referring to his watch.

Ten minutes was not a vast time to wait, and now every eye was fixed in the direction of that part of the wall where the explosion was to take place.

It could not be seen from there, but the houses that stood in the way were not very high, and the shooting upward of the shattered stonework would not be lost.

Talking now ceased altogether, and with strained attention the watchers waited for the great moment. They knew from experience that at the distance sight would precede sound.

At last it came. Up into the air rose a mass of masonry, splitting up and shooting about in every direction. Immediately the spectacle was followed by a roar that was like the sea thundering into some huge cavern.

"Another success," cried the boys, "hurrah!"

But there was more to come, something so amazing and terrifying, that the greater part of the spectators sank into a sitting position and gazed at the spectacle in a state of overwhelming astonishment.

The whole of the great city began to collapse as if it were a house of cards!

Down it sank, roar succeeding roar, houses jumbling together, vast clouds of dust rising into the air;

down, down to the very gates rolled the tide of destruction.

It was so swiftly done that one might have compared it to a sandy town built by children on the sea-shore, succumbing to an inrushing wave.

Save that there was no wave to be seen.

The crashing of falling stonework, the booming of the huge vault as it received the ruins, were alike appalling. And the mystery of it was more overwhelming than all.

Why should the city thus in a few brief minutes utterly collapse?

Assuredly it was not the power of Morse's explosive agent alone, for long after—that is, some minutes afterwards, a comparatively long time—the ruin was being wrought. It was a melting away of a mighty place that had withstood the destructive forces of centuries.

And not only the city, but the very walls went, crashing and falling until the sun ahead was hidden by the huge clouds of dust rising on a breathless air.

It was a spectacle the like of which none there had ever seen, or conceived, or dreamt of. It was a marvellous phenomenon in their eyes, and of all, none was so much astonished for the moment as Morse himself.

The cloud of dust, casting its shadow on the group of spectators, was long in subsiding. For fully a quarter of an hour the ruined city was hidden from their eyes.

But at last it slowly subsided, and of what had been wonderful and beautiful, only a chaotic mass of masonry remained.

Destruction *in excelsis* had been accomplished.

CHAPTER CCLXXXI.

MORSE GIVES HIS EXPLANATION OF THE CATASTROPHE.



GOING on at once through the wood was impossible. Strained excitement, acting like heavy toil, brought upon the spectators a sense of fatigue. None escaped it.

Mr. Farrell had been so appalled that he was found lying on his face, hiding the terrible sight from his eyes with his hands. They raised him, and he gazed about him, dazed.

"Something has happened," he said, drearily, "what is it?"

"Something that justifies my presentiment," an-

swered Jim, gravely, "Had we remained in camp, not one of us would now be alive."

It was so. The ground they recently occupied was completely covered with the ruins of the walls. And more, it seemed as if the earth had sunk just there fully twenty feet.

All shuddered as they thought of what might have been. Morse laid his hand upon Jim's shoulder.

"But for your urging," he said, "I should have remained in the city."

"It is a thing that will hardly bear thinking of," replied Jim; "but how came it about? Surely you did not anticipate such a result."

"I had no notion of it," candidly rejoined Morse, "and it was a mere chance after all. I think I understand it. The spot I chose to operate upon was the *keystone* of the whole arch. When that was violently shattered the rest had to go."

It was a reasonable explanation, although it was not clear to the majority why all those pillars below should yield. Morse selected an open patch of ground, clear of all herbage and covered with sand.

"If you will allow me," he said, "I will illustrate my theory."

They formed round him, and with a slender stick he sketched a circle. In this he marked the spots for imaginary pillars with one larger than the rest.

"This is the key of the whole," he said, pointing to the latter; "it was built first, and all the rest were but additions to it. Possibly the cantilever principle was to some extent followed—a piece put on there, another piece on the opposite side to balance it. Then a portion to the right and a portion to the left, working out and out as the spokes of a wheel until the limit of the circle was reached. The vault extended beyond the region of the city, and the spot I operated on was, I am convinced, the centre of it.

"Now follow me," he continued, after a short pause for breath. "The key falls; then the weight of the houses and roads above forces in the various spokes, as I may call them. It does not matter that they were resting on pillars. They were only useful as supports when the thing was a whole."

"By George!" gasped Martin, "he's got it."

"See the action. The weight forces the pillars over towards the common centre, the staying centre now torn away, pillar after pillar yields to the pressure, coming down, dragging others after it, until the whole is what you see it—a majestic ruin."

His theory was advanced, and there was no dissentient voice to it. All could see that it was a rational suggestion, and, knowing Morse was seldom wrong, they believed in it.

"In years to come," said Morse, as he threw down the stick he had sketched with—"I am looking into

centuries—what may be the story told of the fallen city? How will the historian account for it? Will he believe the story of a 'parcel of schoolboys'? No. He will say it is but a legend, and fake up from the depth of his fervid imagination a description of a foe sacking it as a deed of vengeance, and in the wrath of the hour leaving not one stone standing upon another."

"Or perhaps," said Jim, "like Nineveh and other Assyrian cities, the winds will bury it under the dust of ages, and leave it to be unearthed by another Layard. Boys, we have reached the apex of the wonderful to-day."

There was a suggestion from Terry that prior to departing they should go down and look at the ruins, but Morse dissented.

"Subsidings," he said, "may take place at intervals for days, and it is hardly safe for you. Be satisfied with seeing it from here."

So they turned their backs upon the ancient city, the vast majority of them never to look upon it more.

In a long line the forty sledges that had been found necessary for transporting their possessions filed into the wood. They travelled slowly, for the relief party formed but a third of their number. They had an arduous task before them.

At the head of the whole walked the young leaders, Jim and Morse. Both were armed with guns loaded with small-shot cartridges for the purpose of shooting anything alive that could be turned into food.

Close behind them came Romeo with an empty sledge, intended to bear the burden of their work with the gun.

"One thing, and one thing only," said Jim, "has been left unsolved, Morse. For your sake I regret it."

"Many things have only been solved by speculation," replied Morse. "What do you mean?"

"The walls—the mystery of their being constructed hollow."

"To me, Jim, it is no longer a mystery. The vault undoubtedly extended beyond the city. The walls were therefore built upon the crown of it. It was necessary they should be as light as possible, commensurate with the appearance of solidity and real strength. They were therefore constructed in sections after the manner of our water-tight ships, save that the partitions of stone were fixtures. They served the purpose of bracing the two sides of the shell together."

"The shell was thicker than an ordinary wall," remarked Jim.

"It was," assented Morse; "it was a wonderful place, built by a strange people, but the end of it has come. To think that I, of all living people, should be the means of it! Who would have dreamt of it when I was a child?"

"Who dreamt of time making a Wellington out of a babe in arms?" said Jim. "My dear boy, we grow into what we are fit for, and all we have to do is to use our abilities for the best. Steady; I hear a rustling. Something comes along."

It was a half-grown porker, which paid for crossing their path with his life, and Romeo's sledge received its first portion of the daily load, and in two hours there was enough for the next forty-eight hours upon it.

At the leisurely rate they were travelling it would take them four days to cross, and they felt they could spare the time.

CHAPTER CCLXXXII.

GIUSEPPO PAYS A FINAL VISIT TO THE ISLAND.



A WEEK later, and we find our friends encamped near the chine.

They had not seen it since the earthquake, and found that it had suffered from that convulsion of nature.

The house once inhabited by Mr. Farrell was buried under a mass of fallen earth, and land-slips in other places had contracted it considerably.

But there was still a free passage-way to the farm lands, which Dawson, with assistants, visited early.

They found it overrun with weeds, and, in an agricultural sense, in a terrible condition. Martin soon fashioned them some hoes, and every available hand was set to the task of clearing the produce that had grown up with the rest of vegetable matter.

It was a stiffish task, and it required care; but with forty-odd hands engaged rapid progress was made and something like order extracted out of chaos."

Meanwhile, orderly camp arrangements were made for the support and comfort of all. Each carried on some work that was generally useful. Morse made gunpowder and cartridges, and Jim and some of his chums went every other day into the wood, never returning without bringing with them some good result of their sport.

Miss Elegantine superintended the domestic arrangements, "bossing the niggers," but in so nice a way that they were quite charmed with her.

Chorker was made odd man, and Mr. Farrell did nothing but sit and brood, with the result that every day he waxed older in appearance and gathered no strength.

A watch was kept for Giuseppe, who was expected

ere this, and, truth to tell, doubts of ever seeing him again began to be entertained.

"He cannot leave the charming Lucia," said Terry, with a ferocious grin; "hang him! He is as soft as some others I know. Of course our letters are of no consequence."

"You wait a short time longer," advised Jim, "and if he does not arrive I will run over in the felucca."

This advice was given on the morning of the day when Giuseppe falsified the prophecies of the doubters by returning to the island in a small felucca. He was seen approaching in the afternoon by Felton, who was doing sentry duty on the cliff, and Jim was at once informed of his coming.

A run down to the sea, and a gun fired, caused Giuseppe to head his boat for Silver Bay, and in a quarter of an hour he and Jim clasped hands.

"Senor," he said, "you must have again thought that I was gone for ever."

"We expected you back sooner," Jim admitted.

"Senor, it is the fault of a woman, of course. Lucia says to me, 'Stay till then and then,' and at last she asks me why I stay at all, instead of coming to you with this bag of letters"—he drew it from the boat and handed it to Jim—"and tells me to be gone. On my return the wedding takes place."

"I rather thought that it had taken place before, Giuseppe."

"Senor, a woman marries when she wills, when she has a fool like me at her beck and call. I am to stay and take back aught you may have to send home. In the future my nephew can come to you once a fortnight, as I shall be far off on the other side of Minorca, where I have bought a farm and fishing rights. It was a wise suggestion of my Lucia that we should both go away from all old associations. What say you, senor?"

"It is a very good idea," replied Jim.

"Smugglers," said Giuseppe, with a wise shake of the head, "are splendid company for a single man, but their ways and the hours they keep will not fit in with married life. Therefore, said I, 'On a farm will I live and forget that I was ever one of them.' And as for Lucia, people in the old town will talk and dwell on her fiery days, which may lead to words among the sex, and maybe blows among the men. So, for the sake of love and peace, we go, and the old world of ours will know us no more."

They sauntered up to the camp, which was almost deserted, it being early in the afternoon, and most of the boys, and all the men but Mr. Farrell, away at the farm.

The schoolmaster sat upon a rough camp-stool by a tent, and as Giuseppe approached he looked up and frowned.

"A good day to you, Senor Farrell," he said.

"A bad day for me when I first saw one of your breed," was the curt reply.

"Nay, senor, be not so churlish. It takes two of bad blood and breed to make a quarrel, unless one is simply a fool and blunders into the wrong."

Mr. Farrell frowned, but did not pursue the subject. Jim adjourned to his tent, which he found unoccupied, and emptying the bag, proceeded to sort the letters.

For himself there were three, two from friends at home, and one from Eveline. It bore the Gibraltar postmark. There was also one for Morse, directed in a crabbed hand which Jim recognised as that of the young chemist's scientific father.

For Terry and many others there were letters also, which he duly sorted, and then with his own Jim sat down and began to read.

First of all Eveline's letter.

It began by expressing some surprise that her father had not accompanied her and Mrs. Farrell in their retirement from the island, but there was little regret in its tone. Her old love for her erratic parent seemed to have completely died away.

Apart from some expression of affection for himself, Jim found something of great interest in the latter part of her letter. I will make the matter clearer by giving the paragraph as written:

"Now I must tell you, my dear Jim, that I think the sooner you are all away from this island the better. I am sure you will have to leave it, whether you like it or not, for *there is danger in the air.*"

This line she underscored three times to make it impressive. It ran on thus:

"There is a Spaniard here of the name of Gonsalvo Toreomez. They tell me he is one of the most notable *Hidalgos* of Spain. He is making inquiries about the '*Orsini*'" (more heavy underlining), "and some of the crew who deserted that vessel are in the town. They are of opinion that she went down, but there are whispers that she drifted down to the island, and the *Hidalgo* Toreomez is making arrangements to explore it with the object of finding some trace of her. I don't know what *he* has to do with the '*Orsini*,' but you may expect him, and if he does come, and asks you about her, I know you too well to think that you will tell him a lie."

In a postscript she announced that she was about to go on to England with her mother, where they would stay with some relatives until they heard from or saw Mr. Farrell.

Jim did not like the look of this indication of further trouble with a Spaniard. The *Hidalgo* seemed to be a man of some real importance, very different from the Governor of Minorca, and what he might do when told of the fate of the "*Orsini*," and the subsequent disposal of her cargo, he could not tell.

While thinking over the matter some of the boys came back to camp, among them Terry and Morse, who entered the tent and received their letters.

Terry opened his, and an exclamation burst from his lips.

"Hang it!" he exclaimed, "the governor is coming after all. He merely postponed his visit."

"When do you expect him?" asked Jim.

"He doesn't say," growled Terry; "this is all he wires:

"MY DEAR SON,—Business detains me for the time, and I have made arrangements with Mr. Ganthonny and Mr. Trimmer to pay you the promised visit later on. All well at home. Mother and the rest send their love with mine.

"Your affectionate FATHER."

Morse had a disquieting letter also, but in a different way.

His father had received a Government appointment in Burmah, and would start for that country six weeks after his letter was written. Morse was, if possible, to return to England at once so as to accompany him. In any case he was to follow as soon as possible, and would find that his passage was arranged for.

"And this letter," said Morse, "was written a month ago. Of course, I can't start with him now."

"But you will have to follow him?" suggested Jim.

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Morse, "although I think he will be just as happy without me."

Morse sighed, and turned the letter over, adding:

"I wish I had a mother. Although dad and I see little of each other, I feel horribly lonely now that he is going so far away."

"You are to go to him," said Jim, quietly; "it is only right. But there is no immediate hurry."

"I think not," said Morse.

Giuseppe did not show any impatience about returning, but Jim was sure he was eager to get back to Minorca. So when the boys were all back he asked them to hurry up with anything they might have to write home, as the smuggler—"retired smuggler" is the better term—would start that evening.

"And you may hint that there is a prospect of your coming home," he added, "say within a month or so. Do not give any reason, but say that you will explain everything on your return."

He asked Mr. Farrell if he intended to send any letters, and received a surly negative in reply.

"I shall reserve all statements and complaints," said the schoolmaster, "for the time I return."

So letters were written, some in pencil, for ink was running short, and the tenor of them all was in accordance with the suggestion made by Jim Gordon.

By seven o'clock the bag was made up, and Giuseppe ready to start. He carried one letter with the rest written by Jim to the agent who had assisted Mr. Farrell in obtaining a lease of the island.

Then came the farewell. Giuseppe shook hands with all save Chorker and Mr. Farrell. One he declined to go through the ceremony with, and the other refused to have anything to do with him. The latter was Mr. Farrell.

"All your life," said this highly virtuous man, "you

have pursued an unlawful calling. Your just due would be a prison for the remainder of your life."

"Senor," replied Giuseppe, calmly, "we will not judge each other—you and I. Both are weak men. We sin and err always, and if we both got our deserts, I fear we should be worse off than we are."

Not the least among the affecting adieus was that he had with Charley, who hugged him with a melting tenderness which seemed to be too much for Giuseppe.

He was, anyway, glad when it was over, probably remembering less friendly embraces Charley had indulged in, in the year gone by.

He set sail, to the music of a ringing cheer from the boys, and he waved his silken cap for a while cheerily enough. But when he got a bit out to sea, Jim saw that he sat in the stern of his boat with his head drooping.

There could be no doubt that he felt the parting, especially as he knew, as certain as a man can know anything of the future, that they would never meet again.

Smuggler or what you will, his heart was as tender and true as that of many other so-called better men.

"I can only hope," said Morse, as he sauntered with Jim back to the camp, "that he may not be disappointed with his Lucia."

"I have no fears," said Jim, "on that score. Out of the turmoil of her early life there has come a longing for the peace of the better course. She will find in Giuseppe what she would never have found in Reonardo—the sterling qualities of an honest man, and by that virtue he will hold her."

CHAPTER CCLXXXIII.

GONSALVO TOREOMEZ ARRIVES.



ARRIORS love to fight their battles over again in conversation and in narrative, but they would not care to live all their lives on the field where they met the foe and conquered.

For instance, who has ever heard of generals or common soldiers electing to live upon the scene of battle? It is doubtful if ever one single member of all the hosts engaged in war entertained such a thought.

The fight is over, and the victory or defeat theirs.

That suffices. Save in the imagination, they desire to have nothing more to do with the spot.

Still there was no depression. They were as light-hearted as ever, and the camp was as merry a place as a youngster would care to live in.

After the departure of Giuseppe things went on for a week smoothly enough. Then came the visitor expected by Jim in the person of the Hidalgo, who must have been a man of political power, judging by the class of vessel he came in, for the Hidalgo pure and simple ranks in Spain no higher than our country squires.

He arrived in a gaily-decorated vessel, which anchored off the lagoon.

A boat that might have been a small barge was lowered to convey him ashore, and with about a dozen retainers he came to land.

His coming had been espied, and Jim ordered the tents to be struck and the camp shifted back to the farm. Mr. Farrell, who was not in the secret of the arrival, asked what it meant.

"Am I never to have any rest and peace?" he asked.

"You can remain here, if you like," was Jim's reply.

Had he admitted the reason for shifting, Mr. Farrell would have doggedly insisted on remaining. That Jim was sure of, so he merely said it was his wish to make a change, and the change should be made.

There was one who guessed there was something in it, and that was Chorker; but he made no reference to it then, and by unwonted zeal as assistant tent-striker showed that he more than all was willing to go from the spot.

So the whole camp was shifted ere the Hidalgo had touched land, and Martin and Changeling remained behind for a little while to obliterate as far as possible all signs of recent occupation of the ground.

This was soon done, and the litter picked up, and some sand strewn over the holes made by the pegging of the tents. Then they hastened after the rest, and found the camp had been promptly formed on the verge of the farm, and Jim gone up to the cliff to scan the movements of the new arrival, who might ere long be regarded as an enemy.

The day was drawing to a close, and it was nearly dark when Jim came back. Acting upon his previous instructions, no camp-fires had been lighted, in case the smoke or glare might attract attention.

The only fire set going was in a hollow near the chine where the three niggers had located their kitchen.

Everybody was eager to hear the news, and Jim told them all there was to tell in a few words.

"The Hidalgo," he said, "most certainly arrived with the idea that he would find the school all right. I caught a glimpse of him surveying the ruins in the style of a completely flabbergasted man."

"What sort of fellow is he?" asked Dibble.

"As much like the accepted portrait of Don Quixote," replied Jim, "as it is possible for him to be. He is tall and bony, with a melancholy air that is very striking; but I rather fancy it will not do to cross him."

"What did he want with the school?" inquired Lal Brodie.

"To see if he could gain any information about——"

Jim suddenly stopped short. Standing close by was Mr. Farrell, listening with attentive face. For the moment Jim had forgotten him, or that he was in ignorance of the arrival of the Spaniard.

"What he wanted I cannot say for certain," said Jim, changing his note, "and I do not think it would be politic to make a personal inquiry."

"Where did you leave him?" asked Felton, another incautious inquirer. Fortunately, Jim could freely answer this question.

"He has returned on board his vessel," he replied. "Perhaps he has no taste for camping ashore. Now, have you fellows grubbed? If you have, I will have my tea."

But they had waited for him; and Romeo coming along with the simple fare, they sat in the semi-darkness of that summer night upon the ground outside the tent, discussing the probabilities that might follow the Hidalgo's arrival.

Mr. Farrell had apparently lost all interest in the subject, and as usual held himself aloof, seated apart, with that strange, brooding look upon his face which added to the look of age a night of terror had implanted a while ago upon him.

CHAPTER CCLXXXIV.

CHORKER DOES A GHASTLY DEED.



ONE of the earliest risers—indeed, the earliest save one—on the following morning was Chorker.

Now that he knew a stranger would again be on the island, and evidently a man in authority, he was speculating

on what to do. If there was to be more war and trouble, he wished to be on the winning side.

"Anyways," ran the current of his thoughts, "there is no harm in my tumbling across this 'ere new party and seeing what he's like. If it is safe,

I'll interview him and throw out a feeler. I reckons I can work a oracle of that sort at a pinch."

Chorker had great faith in his powers of address outside the school. With the boys and men connected with it, he admitted that he was a prophet without honour in his own country. But, place him with strangers, high or low, and he fancied that he was equal to every social obligation.

Therefore, was he bent on making the acquaintance of the Hidalgo on the first opportunity that presented itself.

Rising with the birds, he stole out down the chine, and climbing its sloping side, near the bottom, glanced seaward.

There he saw the vessel, still bedecked with bunting, and a few specks moving about the deck, which he rightly judged were a portion of the crew.

As he stood there he suddenly became aware of something moving a few yards away, and staring in the direction of the sound he heard, he saw Mr. Farrell rising from a recumbent position. He had Jim's binoculars in his hand, and appeared to have been employing them in scanning the vessel.

He saw Chorker almost as soon as Chorker saw him, and his face darkened with wrath.

"So, you scoundrel, you are at your old tricks again, are you?"

"Not being aware that I am given to tricks, old or young," replied Chorker, "I shall be glad of an explanation."

"You were playing the spy on me, sir!"

"I warn't. You ain't wuth it."

Mr. Farrell advanced towards him threateningly. Chorker estimated the consequences of knocking him down, and decided that, taking the circumstances into consideration, it could be done.

According, when Mr. Farrell incautiously came within reach, Chorker let fly, and being the possessor of a very big and bony fist, the schoolmaster went down heavily.

He was ill-constituted at the time to bear the shock of a fall, and it stunned him. Lying still upon the ground, he was to all appearances dead.

The dismayed author of the deed gasped for breath. He stooped over the fallen man and listened, with the hope of hearing him breathe. But not the least sound or movement escaped the victim of his violence.

"As I am a living sinner," he groaned, "I've killed him!"

Something must be done.

If he had been in possession of the tools and the time to bury the man, he would have hidden away under the earth the result of his violence. But he had neither one nor the other. The only thing left for him to do was to hurry back to the camp, go to

rest again, and ignore the whole affair. Who would have the right to charge him with the deed?

As far as he knew, nobody had seen him leave the camp, and if he was sharp, nobody would witness his return. Back he must go, and back he went.

It was still very early, and he was overjoyed on seeing there were no signs of movement as yet. He crept into his tent, where also lay the three niggers, and was getting into his crude bed, when Romeo opened one eye.

"You been out, you Chorker?" he cried.

"I ain't stirred out of the tent!" hissed Chorker.

"You got all your clothes on," insisted Romeo.

"Well, I was gettin' up, and secin' you was not awake, I was bent on goin' to bed again," said Chorker.

Romeo grunted, and rolling over, must have gone straight off to sleep again, for when, ten seconds later, his grandfather, who in the matter of waking anyone punctually was as good as any alarm-clock in the world, sat up with a jerk.

"Now, you Romeo," he said, "you going on sleepin' all day?"

A soft snore, long drawn, out was the only reply.

"Dat boy got no marcy on my ole bones," grunted Macbeth, as he slipped out from under his thin summer-blanket. "Ro-o-o-o—mee-e-e-o!"

It was a perfect howl, calculated to waken the dead, but it had not the least effect upon the sleeping Romeo. So his grandfather went over to him, and laid hold of his shoulders.

"Get up, will you!" he screeched, shaking him violently.

Romeo grunted again and yawned, but kept his eyes shut. Another shake opened them.

"Dat you, grandfader?" he asked, in surprise. "What de marrer dat you rouse me in de middle ob de night?"

"It 'bout ten o'clock in de morning," said Macbeth, diverging considerably from the truth. "Marse Jim 'bout, I reckon, long ago."

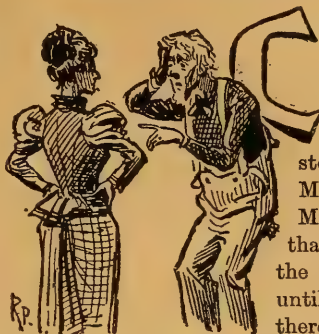
"Dis chile git up," replied Romeo, "as soon as my metal facliters am collected."

Then he tried to collect them by curling up and shutting his eyes; but Macbeth went in for another dose of shaking. That fully awoke him, and he got up.

As he passed Chorker he glanced at him curiously, but there was no responding glance. Curling up, and with face averted, Chorker feigned to be in the profoundest sleep.

CHAPTER CCLXXXV.

THE HIDALGO PREPARES TO ABIDE ASHORE.



HIEFLY occupied by thoughts of the Hidalgo, no member of the camp, leaving out Chorker, bestowed one thought upon Mr. Farrell. Not even Miss Elegantine observed that he was not among the throng moving about until after breakfast, when there was a general move-

ment of the men towards the wood on the summit of the cliff.

Of all besides herself only Chorker remained behind. He felt that the discovery of the body of the school-master was imminent.

Miss Elegantine then suddenly recalled the school-master to her mind, and wondered where he was. Thinking it possible that he might still be in his tent, she bade Chorker arouse him.

"He ain't there," was the response.

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Because he sleeps with me and them niggers in the same tent. He warn't there when I got up. I ain't seen him since larst night, when he seemed restless like. And now I calls it to mind, he did go out late, and I fell asleep."

"What time was that?"

"As near as I can guess, about twenty minutes arter twelve."

Chorker wishing to impress upon his interlocutor that he was speaking the truth, put on the air of one who desired to be correct to the minute.

"You and your twenty minutes!" said Miss Elegantine. "I don't believe you. People without watches give half-hour guesses, if they guess at all."

Her manner was contemptuously disbelieving, but she had no suspicions of foul play, and, to satisfy her doubts, looked into the unoccupied tent. That done, she roamed away down the chine, leaving the guilty Chorker to his reflections.

They were none of the liveliest, but having no sympathy with him, we need not dwell upon his emotions.

Meanwhile the party belonging to the camp had assembled in the wood above; Jim and one or two more to spy out the presumed enemy, the others to lie close in the wood and hear their report.

A boat was seen going to and fro carrying from the vessel a quantity of articles, the nature of which they could not define. Jim had not been able to find



his binoculars, but, concluding he had merely mislaid them, made no fuss.

At length the reason for this travelling to and fro was guessed at by Morse. The Hidalgo was having his effects removed from the ship, with the object of abiding ashore.

Having conceived this idea, the next thing was to verify, and the two boys went on alone, and from the point above Morse's laboratory beheld half a dozen tents pitched on the shore of the lagoon.

They were not large, each being made for the accommodation of two or three men. There was great comfort in this discovery.

"They do not suspect we are about," said Jim, "and have no hostile intentions."

"But it will be as well to wait and see what they do on board the ship," suggested Morse. "One never can tell."

So they waited for two hours, and then the transport of goods ceased, and a tall man they knew to be the Hidalgo was brought ashore with a dozen followers.

They were all clad in the gorgeous dress of the time of Columbus, and the Hidalgo may be said to have been magnificently attired. Their landing partook of the nature of pictures of ancient court-life.

Shortly afterwards the ship spread her canvas and sailed away towards Gibraltar. The Hidalgo then undoubtedly purposed to remain for a time.

"This, if I may say so," remarked Jim, as he and Morse slowly walked back towards the chine, "is the most remarkable thing of all. We have no foe—that is certain. Query, then—have we here a friend?"

"My opinion of the matter," replied Morse, "is that we had better await developments, and not force matters. Our course is to remain where we are and let the Hidalgo alone."

"Ought we not to be prepared for hostilities?"

"Assuredly, and this night I shall be busy in my laboratory."

Jim did not demur to this expressed intention, and on rejoining the others they gave a description of what they had seen, and also their idea of the visitor.

Whatever were the views of Jim and Morse inevitably became the views of the rest, and the general belief was that the Hidalgo would prove to be a nuisance, if nothing more.

But with only ten men they did not fear him.

Had they not fought six times and more that number, and come out victorious? And were they now to be daunted by the presence of so small a band?

"I suggest," said Terry, "that we give him notice not to intrude here. Let him go to the other side of the island."

"Well," said Jim, drily, "you are at liberty to take

it to him. When will you go? To-night or in the morning?"

Terry said he would think it over, but unless he had witnesses of the delivery, in case of "legal action," he would rather not take it at all.

Reaching the camp, they learnt from Miss Elegantine that Mr. Farrell was away. It was news, and of a startling nature, too.

"He has gone to pay a visit to the Hidalgo," remarked the facetious Terry.

"Many a true word is spoken in jest," said Morse. "That is my own opinion."

Chorker, who had been skulking behind one of the tents, quaking in his boots, gathered heart anew on hearing this declaration.

He came boldly out, and saluting Morse with a respectful touch of the forehead, said:

"I make bold to report that I saw him going down the chine early this morning afore anyone was up."

"Why did you not tell me that?" demanded Miss Elegantine, sharply. "I asked you if you had seen the man, and you vowed you hadn't seen him since last night."

"Not *lately*," said Chorker; "them was my words. Romeo knows I was up and about early."

"Me know dat you come a-skulkin' into de tent 'bout daylight, as if you done sumfin'," said Romeo.

Thus was a staggering reply, but Romeo did not mean anything by it. He always suspected Chorker had done something he ought to have left alone, and it was but a stereotyped condemnation of him—a shot fired instinctively, in fact.

But it went home, and the face of the old rascal became livid. He turned aside, and shuffled off like a thief detected in the act of robbing someone, if nothing worse.

That was how the spectators viewed it. None thought of anything very serious, but in his heart Chorker felt that a revelation of his crime was impending.

He sneaked about all that evening, and was not reassured when, on playing the spy upon Morse and Jim in conversation, he heard the latter say:

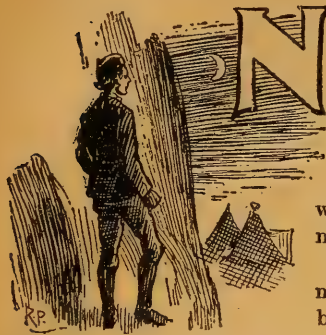
"Farrell has gone to the Hidalgo, and as, if left alone, he may tell him all sorts of lies, I shall visit the liar—I mean lion—in his lair."

"It's all up," muttered Chorker, as he crept away; "they will find Farrell is not there. Then they will look for the body, and—and—what an everlasting fool I was to say that I see him starting off in the morning! That is jest like me. Must go a-putting the rope around my own neck."



CHAPTER CCLXXXVI.

MORSE SEES STRANGE THINGS IN THE NIGHT.



NO indications of being visited that night being shown, Morse went off to his laboratory, and Jim appointed himself as sentry within easy hail of the mouth of the chine.

Neither felt very much alarmed, it is true, but, with their old precautionary habits, they took time by the forelock as to preparing to meet a foe, and keeping watch against surprise.

Morse had nothing more than a fair quantity of gunpowder made. All of his more powerful inventions were, if one may use such a term, out of stock. With the object of astonishing, and perhaps alarming, the Hidalgo, should the occasion to do such a thing arise, he was going to manufacture a small quantity of the strongest.

Where Jim remained on guard he could see nothing of the lagoon. But Morse from the region of his cave laboratory had a clear view of it by the light of a young moon.

The hour was close on midnight, and all the tents except one were closed and dark. The entrance of that exception was open, and the interior strongly illuminated.

It was too powerful a light for oil, or even gas of the ordinary class. Morse gazed at it with astonishment.

"How has it got out here?" he muttered. "It might be the electric light."

He could see a table strewn with various things, but, at the distance, could not tell what they were, more than that they were vases or utensils of some description. The Hidalgo advanced from the back of the tent and sat down.

He brought with him a heavy volume, which he opened, and turning over several pages, found one he was looking for, and, with his head upon his hands, read closely for a time.

Morse was spellbound and fascinated. Here was something he had not looked for. This tall, old man, in the garb of centuries ago, was evidently a student. What need then of holding him in fear?

Morse could not go in to work. He sat upon the edge of the cliff, looking down upon the distant tent. From it the Hidalgo presently emerged, bearing a vase from the table.

He placed it on the ground, and applying a match to the contents, there flared up, for a moment only, a most vivid and unearthly light.

It partially blinded him, so that for a time there was little more than a blank before him.

But presently his sight came back, only to look upon other things done by this weird stranger.

He emptied another vase upon the sands, and immediately there were a hundred fiery snakes twisting and turning about, and sometimes skipping into the air in a fashion that was bewildering and astonishing. Then, as the sun breaks through a fog, so did Morse see what manner of man this was.

"By George!" he muttered, "the Hidalgo is a chemist."

And he saw, too, that he might be a greater one than all others he had ever known. Morse was too modest to put himself in the list.

It would not be easy to astonish this man. Was it worth while preparing to do so? On the whole, yes, perhaps, so Morse turned into his laboratory, and set to work.

Occasionally a bright light would flare up over land and sea, and he perceived its glare outside the entrance to his retreat, but he wasted no more time in watching.

"To-morrow I may do something to astonish him," thought the young chemist.

He did not possess the power of looking into the future, or he would have seen that by-and-by the Hidalgo would astonish him. But that is life. The unexpected ever happens.

His mind, however, was exercised by what he had seen, and he could not devote himself so closely to his labours as he would have liked to do. Eventually he laid them aside, and once more adjourned to the open air.

It was then about two in the morning, and there was still a light in the tent of the Hidalgo, but it was of considerably less power. Indeed, it was but an ordinary light, and he could see no one stirring.

Morse was tempted to go nearer to the Spaniard's camp, and, slipping down the face of the cliff, he approached it cautiously.

No watchful sentinel was visible.

Emboldened by this discovery, Morse crept up nearer and nearer to the tents, until he was within a few yards of that occupied by the Hidalgo.

Within, he caught sight of the Spaniard, who had drawn back his chair, and was sleeping in it. To the right of him there was a camp-bed on which a person was lying. He was in his clothes outside the coverings, and a familiar pair of top-boots, the only article of apparel the sleeper had taken off, stood at the foot of the bed.

They were a guide to the identity of the man, and

Morse, drawing yet nearer, saw that it was Mr. Farrell, who was thus treated as an honoured guest.

For honoured he must have been by the Hidalgo—for men do not give up their beds and sleep in chairs to oblige persons they deem to be of no importance.

Perhaps never in the whole course of his existence had Morse been so greatly astonished. It was a staggerer of staggerers to him.

And it was the more surprising, as Spaniards of the Hidalgo class are excessively proud, and more given to exacting deference from a stranger than exhibiting it.

Last of all it was disquieting, for if Mr. Farrell had impressed the Hidalgo with an idea of his importance, whatever tale the schoolmaster chose to tell would be accepted as a fact.

Morse hastened along the sands until he came opposite the spot where Jim was on the watch. There he managed to scale the cliff and joined him. Jim was amazed when he heard his story.

"Nap must have been with him all yesterday," he said.

"I should say so," returned Morse, "and goodness only knows what yarn he has planked into him. But there he is, and having got in the first word, most effectually I should say, we shall have more trouble."

Debating the subject on the way back to the camp on the farm, they settled on paying the Hidalgo a visit, meanwhile keeping the rest in ignorance of the curious result of the schoolmaster's latest escapade.

"One tale is as good until another is told," said Jim, "and as you cannot now think that the Hidalgo contemplated any offensive action on landing, he may be disposed to hear our side."

Wearily with their night's work they went to rest, and soon forgot all puzzling matters in profound sleep.

CHAPTER CCLXXXVII.

THE HIDALGO BECOMES A JUDGE.



CHORKER had passed a restless night. In his mind's eye heavy trouble was not far off. The body of Mr. Farrell must be found, and then for him there was nothing but the punishment of the criminal.

And yet, when he came to think of it, he was not actually a murderer. He had merely hit the schoolmaster with his fist. Could he be held responsible for the weakness of a man who would die under a blow? He thought not.

"Perhaps," he thought, "if I make a clean breast of it to young Gordon he'll take a merciful view on it."

This was a happy thought, in his estimation, and as it was in still stronger possession in his mind in the morning—a very rare thing with overnight thoughts—he sought Jim at an early hour, and with his accustomed circumlocution laid his story before him.

He particularly sought to impress on Jim that he had done the dreadful deed in self-defence, and that Mr. Farrell had rushed upon him "with murder in his eye." Jim gravely told him that he could not accept that statement in its entirety.

"You will, however," he added, "hear more from me by-and-by. I must take counsel with my friends on so important a matter. Meanwhile you will withdraw from the camp to the chine, and there await a further communication from me."

"I knows you are just," whined Chorker, "and won't be 'ard on me for a accident."

Then he withdrew, and shortly after Jim and Morse passed through the chine on their way to the Hidalgo's camp. They saw him sitting on a rock, with his head bowed down upon his hands, looking wonderfully like a criminal awaiting the coming of the hangman.

It struck Jim so forcibly, that he remarked to Morse:

"If he were in a cell with iron fetters on him, he would not have a stronger likeness to a condemned ruffian."

"He is too much of a cur," said Morse, "to make even a good ruffian."

Chorker, wrapped in the gloomiest of meditations, arising from a recently-formed conviction that after all he had better have said nothing, did not hear their light footsteps as they passed by.

They hastened onwards by the familiar road through the chine and along the beach, until they sighted the Hidalgo's camp. It was now bright with the figures of the gorgeously-attired men moving to and fro.

A short distance off a fire was burning, and by it stood a man in white, who had the appearance of a French *chef*, as he indeed proved to be.

At the entrance of the Hidalgo's tent sat the gaunt-looking nobleman, at table with Mr. Farrell. They were partaking of breakfast, and in solemn state Gonzalvo Toreomez exhibited elaborate courtesies to his guest.

"We have an uphill task," said Jim, making a wry face, "and had better not intrude until they have finished. The most amiable of men will growl over an interrupted meal."

They would have retired, but, as it happened, they were espied by one of the attendants of the Hidalgo, who, with an exclamation, called the attention of others about him to strangers being in their vicinity. Four of them came running towards the boys.

"Better stand our ground," said Jim.

Morse nodded assent, and still slowly advancing, they were soon face to face with the attendants.

They were not armed, and the two friends had no visible weapons. Nothing hostile was attempted, but four men formed round the boys, and one of them addressed Jim in English.

"You are intruding here, and must go back," he said.

"We seek an audience with the Hidalgo Toreomez," replied Jim.

The man glanced backwards, and saw the Spaniard in the act of rising from the table.

Mr. Farrell had risen also, and they were exchanging bows.

The next moment both sighted the group formed by the boys and the attendants. Mr. Farrell gesticulated in their direction, and apparently said something violent.

The Hidalgo listened with imperturbable gravity, and beckoned for the party to approach.

He reseated himself, while Mr. Farrell endeavoured to compose himself, and took up a position behind his host's chair.

Jim and Morse were escorted up, and told to stand quietly for a moment, while the man they had spoken with conferred with his master.

He went close up to him, and said, in a whisper:

"Excellency, these are two of the boys who have been condemned by the senor, your guest."

"Place them before me," said the Hidalgo.

They were already before him, but the attendant led them a step nearer. They bowed quietly and respectfully, the Hidalgo regarding them with eyes that were strangely sad in their expression.

Now that Jim had a close view of the man, he looked more than ever like Don Quixote.

"Your names?" said the Hidalgo, in excellent English.

They gave them. Mr. Farrell leant forward, and said, breathlessly:

"The leaders of the gang, excellency."

"Peace for a while," said the Hidalgo, with a deprecatory motion of the hand. "You have told me your story; now let me hear theirs. I am a just judge, and listen to both sides.

"Senors Gordon and Morse," he said, addressing the two friends, "answer me truly, as you would live. You are pupils of the school kept by the Senor Farrell?"

"Of the school that *was* kept, your excellency," replied Jim, "but it has long ceased to exist."

"What do you call long?"

The house was burnt down last year, and since then there has been no school."

The sad eyes looked Jim through and through.

Then, with a quickening of voice and gesture, the Hidalgo commanded Mr. Farrell to step to the front.

"I must see the faces of accuser and accused," he said, "for looks are oftentimes more truthful than words."

Very unwillingly Mr. Farrell came out from his place in the rear, and obeying a motion of the hand from the Hidalgo, stood beside the boys.

"But yesterday," said Gonsalvo Toreomez, "the Senor Farrell came to me with a story of his wrongs. He said that his scholars had rebelled, robbed him of all his possessions, burnt down his house, and turned him adrift. As a homeless man—a gentleman and a scholar, as he declares himself to be—I received and treated him as the guest of the oldest Hidalgo in Spain."

"We have robbed him of nothing," said Jim; "the house was burnt down by his enemies from Minorca, and his story is a *lie*."

"Have you not in your possession all my valuable collection of ancient things found upon this island?" demanded Mr. Farrell.

"What we have we found ourselves, and they are our own."

"I rent this island from the Spanish Government," said Mr. Farrell, "and you are boys under my care."

Jim produced a paper from his breast—the abdication of Mr. Farrell from his position as ruler of the boys, written and signed in the days of trouble at the castle.

"Will your excellency look at this?" said Jim; "at the foot of it you will find Mr. Farrell's name. He will not deny writing it."

"I was compelled by force to sign," cried the wretched old fraud.

The Hidalgo glanced over the document, and handed it back to Jim.

"A man who would sign that," he said, "is unfit to rule babes. As for his story, I am satisfied it is a lie. Begone from my sight, senor!"

"May I not say one word?" pleaded Mr. Farrell.

The Hidalgo merely glanced at him, and the look sufficed. It expressed all the indignation and abhorrence of a nobleman for a mean-spirited and untruthful being. Mr. Farrell shrank from it, as the creeping worm does from the touch of a stick in the hands of a man.

"Seats, Anselmo!" cried the Hidalgo.

The attendant, who had escorted the boys to the Hidalgo, hastened to get chairs and place them.

As they were sitting down Morse looked up the beach, and beheld Mr. Farrell shuffling along towards the chine, more bent and looking older than ever.



CHAPTER CCLXXXVIII.

JIM RECALLS A FIND OF LONG AGO.



NOW," said the Hidalgo, "one of you tell me your story, and let me have the whole truth."

"It will take a long time, your excellency," replied Jim.

"It matters not," was the rejoinder; "I am a good listener, for I am a lover of story-telling. Proceed."

So Jim, as spokesman, began his story, and, sticking to plain facts, got over the ground at a rapid rate.

The Hidalgo only interrupted him when some idiom of our language puzzled him. As soon as it was explained he resumed his thoughtful listening attitude until the narrative reached the point when the "Orsini" was sought and brought ashore by Lal Brodie and a companion under the novel circumstances related in the early part of our story.

Immediately the vessel was named, the Hidalgo sat upright in his chair, his eyes lost their sleepy expression, and when Jim came to clearing out the cargo, he asked him excitedly:

"Did you clear the hold of everything?"

"We did," replied Jim.

"And appropriated everything?"

"No; your excellency. We took what was our own, and, now that I recall the time, I remember hiding away a number of cases in a cave, a mere hollow, close to the spot. As they were not for us, of course we had no right to them, and I thought it possible that we might find an owner for them one day."

"Were they marked?" asked the Hidalgo, with a quivering lip. His emotion astonished the boys, but they endeavoured to look as if they did not observe it.

"Yes, with the letters G. T. H.," replied Jim.

A cry of exultation burst from the lips of the Hidalgo.

"Found!" he gasped. "And you—you will not deny my right to them?"

"No, assuredly not," said Morse and Jim together.

"We have no right to do so," added Jim, "nor, indeed, can we deny your right to claim the few things we have found while exploring an old city on the other side of the island."

"A fig for all else," cried the Hidalgo, "so long as I have my own! Here, Anselmo!"

The attendant came forward.

"Writing materials!"

They were speedily placed on the table before him, and the Hidalgo wrote a short document and signed it.

"This," he said, holding it up, "will give you a right to have and to hold all that you have found here when I have recovered my own that came in the 'Orsini.' No matter what is there. The world would value it lightly. To me there is no treasure on earth so precious. Is the cave far from here?"

They told him it was a long walk, a matter of two hours, perhaps. The Hidalgo smiled.

"I could walk twenty-four hours," he said, "knowing that I should find my treasure in the end. We will all go. I must shift my camp, and you will accompany me. Indeed, there is no other course, for I know nothing of the hiding-place you speak of."

Jim bethought himself of his friends on the farm, and he asked permission to run over to them before going on to the storing-place of the Hidalgo's property.

But Gonsalvo was in a hurry, and suggested instead that Anselmo should carry a message thither. Jim accordingly wrote a few lines to Terry, assuring him that everything had turned out for the best, and not to look for their return that day.

Anselmo went his way, and the Hidalgo's tents were immediately struck, and the entire party set off towards the scene of the "Orsini's" stranding.

The curiosity of Jim and Morse was excited on the point of the contents of the cases marked "G. T. H." These letters of course stood for Gonsalvo Toreomez, Hidalgo.

Everything in connection with the Spanish nobleman showed that he was possessed of wealth. All the fittings and appointments of the camp were of the best. The dresses of his attendants were of very rich material, and his own apparel, though quiet as to colour, was of the richest in quality.

But on these and other personal matters he had nothing to say. Indeed, as they journeyed along he talked very little. His mind was closely and, judging by his face, pleasantly occupied.

"What do you think of him?" whispered Jim, as they drew near their destination.

Once during the journey they halted to partake of refreshment, and everything was done on a lavish scale with much courtesy on the part of the host. And now, as Jim put the question to his friend, the afternoon was far advanced, with the sun setting in a haze rarely seen in that latitude.

"He is a student and a dreamer," replied Morse.

"Some study and do not dream," remarked Jim; "others dream without studying. I do neither."

"You are practical from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot," said Morse, with a smile.

The Hidalgo awoke from a fit of meditation, and,

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SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.

The Island School.



"My compound," said the Hidalgo, waving his hand towards the box which Anselmo carried so carefully.

catching the last words, asked Morse to repeat them. He did so.

"And that is your friend?" mused the Spaniard. "He is one of the company of history makers. I would I possessed his qualities. I like him."

The last sentence was spoken in a lower tone, and as apparently more of the nature of a soliloquy than a remark made to another. Having uttered it, the Hidalgo lapsed again into a meditative mood.

It will be remembered that the "Orsini" had been broken up by the winter storms, but portions of the vessel were strewn along the shore, half-buried in sand and shingle. It was therefore easy to locate the spot.

The small cave was blocked up, but Jim succeeded in finding it, and just before nightfall they entered it. The property of the Hidalgo had not been touched.

"Behold," he said, extending a hand towards the cases, "the gift of Monsieur Lablanque, the greatest of the sons of France, for he holds the fate of nations in the hollow of his hand. With a handful of powder he could wreck Paris, and the means of making tons of it are here."

Morse was startled. Here was matter of vast interest to him as a student of explosives. The Hidalgo resumed:

"In their present condition they are harmless, but mixed according to the directions I have here"—he touched his breast to indicate that a document was there concealed—"I hold the fate of the world in my grasp."

They could not answer him, being overwhelmed with astonishment.

"I call them a gift," murmured the Hidalgo, in his dreamy way, "for what are a few thousand francs for the materials and the secret of mixing them?"

Aloud he said, "I shall sleep here to-night, for the hour is late, and my people are weary with the journey."

"But why do that?" asked Jim. "Your excellency will find the cases safe in the morning."

"Once," said the Hidalgo, gravely, "I lost them. For months I passed almost sleepless nights. I wrote to Lablanque for a further supply, but received no answer. I could not expect him to repeat his great gift. As he explained to me, the materials are rare. One thing alone cost the great chemist years of his life to discover, and then it was only in such small quantities that it cost many more years to collect that little store. No, it would have been too much to expect. He was doubtless angry with me for asking it."



CHAPTER. CCLXXXIX.

MORE ABOUT THE HIDALGO'S CHEMICAL TREASURE.



IT was not without some further murmuring that the two friends left the Hidalgo in the miserable little cave for the night. But he was firm on the point, and refused to stir.

"I will not lose sight of my treasure again," he said. "For yourselves there is my tent and all in it. Use it as your own. My servants also are yours."

And, to make sure that it should be so, he summoned one of the men and told him the same thing.

None of the Hidalgo's followers exhibited any signs of astonishment when they heard he was going to pass the night in that hole of a place. Evidently they were used to his eccentricities.

Towards Morse and Jim they bore themselves like well-trained servants. The wish of the Hidalgo was a law to them.

Within an hour a rich repast was served in the tent, and the two friends sat down to partake of it.

Morse was in a thoughtful mood, and Jim fancied he knew the cause.

"Never mind, old fellow," he said; "it is a bit of a knock, but you will get over it."

"What is a knock?" asked Morse.

"The Hidalgo's coming along with something that, I am bound to confess, seems to put your discoveries into a back seat."

"My dear Jim," said Morse, "I am not thinking of that at all. I have told you all along that my discoveries are as yet in their infancy. I was merely wondering if his excellency means to keep these secrets to himself, or whether he will play the generous brother student and let me into the light."

"A pinch of powder appears to me to be barely sufficient to wreck Paris," said Jim, doubtfully.

"It would all depend on where it was placed," replied Morse. "Explosives faultily handled are worse than useless. In placing I think I could beat the Hidalgo, no matter what material he may be able to handle."

"Nothing like confidence, old man."

"Anyway, Jim, I mean to challenge him to a competitive exhibition of our respective powers."

"Giving him time to mix his new material, of course?"

"He may mix what he pleases," said Morse; "and now you may give me a glass of claret."

Jim poured it out, and continued, in a good-humoured way, to comment on the cheek of Morse in even thinking of challenging the Hidalgo. But his chaff was as water on a duck's back to Morse.

"Wait and see," he said. "If I am beaten, I shall be a learner, at all events. I cannot fail to pick up something useful. You can hardly expect a brat of my age to be at the top of the chemical tree."

"Certainly not," assented Jim.

They finished their dinner, and on inquiry learnt that the Hidalgo had partaken sparingly of bread and wine.

"It is his habit," said the attendant, "when deep in some study."

"His excellency is a very learned man?" suggested Jim.

"He is a good master," replied the attendant, "and that is all such humble people as myself think of. Senor, we of the poorer sons of Spain do not look upon the modern discoveries with favour. If man must kill man, let it be with the sword."

"Or the knife," remarked Morse.

"Ay, senor," said the attendant, "or the knife. We know that the men of your country say it is cowardly to stab a foe in the back. But we are taught to do it from our cradle, and would you have us falsify the teaching of our loved parents?"

They did not pursue the argument, which, from a Spaniard's point of view, was unanswerable. The attendant left them, satisfied with having gained an argumentative victory.

Morse amused himself with looking at the contents of a table on one side of the tent, on which was displayed a collection of curious instruments, apparently of a scientific use.

He could make nothing of them, excepting a tall lantern with a spring at the bottom, which he discovered was used to force up a thin band of magnesium wire as it slowly burnt away like the wick of a candle.

"This explains the mystery of that powerful light I saw inside the tent. It is not a new idea, but impracticable for general use on account of the expense. Lighting this tent for an hour would cost a sovereign."

"What matters," said Jim, "if the Hidalgo can afford it?"

"It is his affair, of course," remarked Morse, indifferently.

Again and again did he examine the rest of the Hidalgo's stock of things on view, and for none, except the lantern, could he conceive a use.

"It is almost aggravating," he said to Jim, who was delighted to find Morse with a nut that could not be cracked at once. "I ought to have a general idea of

the use of anything in this line after seeing all I have at home in the governor's possession. But these things beat me."

"Ask the Hidalgo to explain them to you," said Jim.

"I won't," flatly answered Morse. "I prefer finding out things for myself."

In that dogged frame of mind he went to rest. In addition to the couch of their host, another was brought in, a long camp-chair, that served as a bed, and both the youngsters slept soundly.

Whatever might be the speculations of Morse, he was not going to allow them to deprive him of rest.

CHAPTER CCXC.

THE HIDALGO PREPARES FOR A GREAT DAY.



MORSE was awake and out before Jim in the morning. He found the Hidalgo up and stirring before him. He stood before the mouth of the cave, and as the youth approached, he warned him, with a gentle sweep of the hand, to stand back.

"I have opened the cases," he said, "and have begun the mixing already. No hand but mine must touch the perilous stuff."

"As you heard last night," replied Morse, "I am a bit of a chemist myself, and the son of a well-known scientific man. There would be no harm in my sharing your labours."

But the Hidalgo shook his head.

"Think of the fearful results of an accident or an error in the work! No, it must not be."

"Are the servants of your excellency aware of your wishes in this respect?"

"They are. I made them known last night, and warned them of the possible danger."

"And they are not troubled?" said Morse, glancing towards the men, who had now turned out and were beginning the work of the morning.

"They are my faithful adherents," said Gonsalvo Toreomez, "and, though they meet death in my service, they will not desert me. Besides, they have faith in my careful toil, and are not afraid."

Nor did they seem to be. As they hustled about they were laughing and chatting in their light-hearted manner, betraying a freedom of intercourse among themselves, even in the presence of their master, not to be seen among the servants of a British nobleman's household.

But their demeanour when addressing the Hidalgo left nothing to be desired.

"Your excellency," said Morse, after a pause, "may I be so bold as to make a proposition to you?"

"Assuredly," was the reply. "Are we not friends and brethren in science?"

It was strange to hear the old man speak to Morse, a mere boy, in this way; but to the student age is nothing, and ability and experience everything.

"I wish to retire awhile from the gracious hospitality you have extended towards me to prepare some materials for exhibiting to you the strength and power of two or three discoveries I have made."

The Hidalgo smiled softly.

"You can go when you please, and your companion——"

"Your excellency, he will remain. I pray you not to think that it is fear that induces me to ask leave to go. I merely desire that you should see how near I approach towards the great Lablanque."

"You shall do as you wish," said the Hidalgo, serenely, "and when you have shown us what you can do, behold, I will display my power."

This was exactly what Morse wanted, and having demurred to it for a while as something too much for him to expect, he expressed himself delighted with the suggestion.

"Emboldened by your kindness, excellency," pursued Morse, "I will further suggest the nature of the experiments. About a mile on the other side of the lagoon there stand two rocks close inshore—so close, indeed, that one can wade to them without going above the ankles, unless the weather is rough. Let us each take one and prepare to blast it, and he who most effectually does his work shall be reckoned victor."

"A right royal challenge!" declared the Hidalgo. "My hand on it."

He extended a long, lean hand, which Morse respectfully clasped, and the engagement to compete was settled.

That day week was the time appointed for it to come off, and, of course, all on the island would be there to witness the thrilling sight.

Morse went back to the tent, where he found Jim half-dressed, and yawning still with sleep.

"I never felt more beastly tired in my life," he said. "Have you had a dip?"

"No," replied Morse. "I shall leave it until I get back to the lagoon."

And then he told Jim that the competition he wished for had been arranged, and he would depart in a few hours to get to work preparing his materials for the great day.

"You know the rocks, Jim," he said. "We used to call them the Black Pinnacles."

"I know them right enough," replied Jim. "But look here—don't you think it rather cool of you to arrange for my remaining here, with the chance of being blown over to Africa?"

"The Hidalgo," said Morse, demurely, "is an experienced man, and as careful as myself."

"Still, one never knows, and you have often refused to have me near you when busy."

"Well, Jim, if you are nervous——"

"Oh, blow it, I remain, of course! I merely wished to ease my feelings by calling your attention to the cheek of arranging for my possible extermination."

"I'll back the Hidalgo to get through his work safely," said Morse, warmly.

Jim was satisfied, and the friendly remonstrance came to an end. Two hours afterwards Anselmo returned to the camp with the news that all was well on the farm, and everybody pleased to find that Jim had fallen among friends.

Morse by that time was ready to depart, and he took his leave of the Hidalgo outside the cave. Jim smiled as he saw the levelling influence of the study of the science of chemistry on the pair. They parted as comrades, apparently, without any distinction of a social nature or of age.

"This day week, senor," said the Hidalgo.

"This day week, excellency," said Morse, and with a wave of the hand the Spaniard returned to his cave. And from it he did not emerge again that day.

As he did not summon his attendants to bring him food or drink, nothing was taken to him. They evidently understood his ways and disposition.

Jim mooned about alone, occasionally passing the cave in a casual sort of way, and glancing in to see what could be seen.

It was not much to view—merely the Hidalgo with scales and weights, and pestle and mortar, and open manuscript, mixing and remixing with all the care requisite for the proper handling of such dangerous materials.

"Morse has met his match, and more than his match, this time," thought Jim, "but when he gets as old as the Hidalgo he will have to look about to find his level. Where is science leading us to? That is what I want to know."

It is what many of us would like to know, but it cannot be. We must take the good things provided for us by clever men as they come, each as they arrive in order, and be as thankful as we can.

It was not until evening had come that the Hidalgo gave up his work and came out of his den. The tinkle of a silver bell summoned an attendant, to whom he gave orders to prepare a dinner on the sands by the mouth of the cave, and to convey an invitation to Jim to join him in the *al fresco* repast.

Jim was only too pleased, for he was getting to like

the Hidalgo, who, in many ways, was as simple as a child; and not the least of the many curious experiences of his life on the island was the sitting there with the old noble of Spain, the light of the setting sun casting their long shadows upon the sandy shore.

The food, as heretofore, was good, the cooking and serving excellent, and the claret of the best.

The Hidalgo talked little, until the sun disappeared and the stars came out. Then he lighted a cigar, and without any previous reference, spoke of the castle that overlooked Seville.

"The finest of them all," he said, "although I would not boast. Nor is it pride that leads me to tell you there is no ancestry in Spain older than mine. I speak of them, as I believe you will be interested."

"I am, indeed," replied Jim, eagerly. "Tell me about your castle."

"It is vast and beautiful," said the Hidalgo, "but saddening to live in, for there are terrible associations with it one would fain forget. Men used to be very cruel, even more cruel than the Turk in Armenia, where I have heard he is a fiend to govern."

"You reside in your castle when at home?" suggested Jim.

"Not at all times," was the answer, "but I am always drawn back to it ere long. A dear, rambling old place, a magnificent pile, a maze of architecture. You would love to see it, perhaps?"

"I should, indeed," answered Jim, and he meant it.

"When you leave this island, you come and stay with me, and bring your friend Morse. He and I can study together, while you can wander about my castle and sate yourself with the wonders and horrors of it. Both are there, the mighty towers—things of beauty—and the gloomy dungeons where the groans of men imprisoned years ago, centuries, if you will, to my thinking echo still."

Jim was stirred to the depths of his spirit. Though practical, it had its full share of romance in its composition. Nothing would please him better than to go to the castle of this old nobleman. It would be an experience eminently in harmony with his love of adventure.

"Now that the school is no more," said the Hidalgo, "you will not remain here, I suppose?"

"Not for long," answered Jim.

"Then we will leave it together, and you shall go to my home in Seville, say for a month."

Jim assented, thanking the Spaniard for his hospitality. But little did he dream of all that was to come out of the acceptance of the offer of this strange old man.

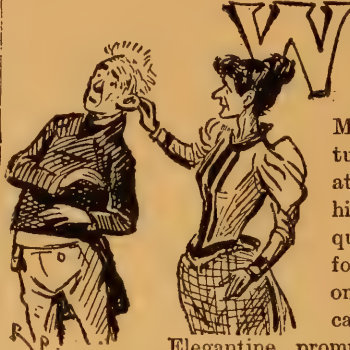
It was late when Jim retired to the tent, with the scarcely comforting assurance from the Hidalgo that he would go on with his labours, and probably test the results in the course of the night.

"I hope he will not go wrong with his work," thought Jim, as he lay down, tired with doing nothing all day; "but I must take my chance of accidents as I have before. He is a dear old man, but I must confess he puzzles me."

He was not puzzled sufficiently to keep him awake more than a few minutes, and nothing happened in the night to disturb him.

CHAPTER CCXCI.

PREPARING TO LIFT THE FIRST OF THE BLACK PINNACLES.



WHEN Morse reappeared in the camp he found matters all right.

Mr. Farrell had returned and made an attempt to resume his authority. It was quite the usual thing for him now to do so on the least provocation. But Miss

Elegantine promptly took him in hand, and, with a few words and one decided action, put him into a back seat again.

"She led him into the tent," said Terry, as he explained the matter to Morse, "by the ears, just as if he were a naughty boy."

"The man is to be pitied in some respects," said Morse. "Now, Terry, I want you to help Martin to get ready for me to blow up the biggest of the Black Pinnacles.

"Murder!" exclaimed Terry, "what for?"

An explanation given him, he readily undertook his share of the task. Morse took his assistants down with sundry tools to the rocks, and wading through the shallow, short distance of sea, they climbed upon the nearest and biggest.

These rocks may be compared, as to their form, to two gigantic skittles, with notches and pieces chipped out by long service. They were about thirty feet through the base, and the tallest was fifty feet high.

It was in height the premier rock by about ten feet.

"It will want some lifting," said Martin.

"It will," calmly replied Morse; "but lifted it will be."

He selected two places in the shore side, and two on the opposite side, where holes had to be drilled. He explained that the deeper they could be got the better,

but must not anywhere be more than three inches in diameter.

Martin was in possession of drills that, by screwing one piece upon another, could be relied on to work to the depth of six feet. Morse declared that would be ample.

"How long will it take?" he asked.

"Two days or more," was the reply, "for we must get along with caution. These sea-eaten rocks are mighty hard."

"Get to work on the morrow, and stick to it until done," said Morse.

One day in his laboratory, he thought, would suffice for him as far as the material for blasting had to be considered. That prepared, he had other things in his mind wherewith he meant to astonish the Hidalgo, Gonsalvo Toreomez.

There was a quiet, easy confidence about him that impressed Martin, who was acquainted with the story of the gift of the mighty Lablanque to the Spaniard.

"Nothing can be done that he won't try to beat," thought the blacksmith, as they sauntered back. "My great fear is that one day he will *overdo it*."

The next day Morse was away from the early morning until the evening. By that time, as he had calculated, his share of the work of production would be completed.

Most of the residents in the camp spent the time in the neighbourhood of the Black Pinnacles watching the two drillers at work.

It was, as Martin had foretold, very slow work, for the rock was like iron, and to hurry the drilling might end in breaking the tools. Little by little they worked their way in, until, as night approached, Martin completed his share, and Terry gave in with half of his done.

"It is heart-breaking work," he said, "and the further you get into the rock the harder it is."

"I'll take on the finishing," replied Martin, "and you can do the beginnings of the other pair."

"It will relieve me," assented Terry; "but when done, do you believe that the opening will be wide enough?"

"Morse knows," remarked Martin, as he put the tools into his basket.

The next day, by adopting the arrangement of division of labour suggested by Martin, the task was finished, and Morse, inspecting the drilling, declared it to be perfect.

"As clean as a gun-barrel," he said. "To-morrow I will begin fixing the charge."

"Begin it?" echoed Terry. "Will it take long?"

"Quite three days," replied Morse; "because you see, old fellow, all the padding will have to be pushed home with the greatest care. The slightest jar will bring about an explosion."

"You have got a new thing ready, then?" was the breathless rejoinder.

"No, the old explosive that I used in Gordontown, but of extra strength, and therefore more sensitive. Will you care to give me a hand?"

"Hum!" ejaculated Terry. "On the whole, I think *not*. I should not like to bring discredit on you by bungling it."

Morse laughed.

"You might have obtained credit for foolhardiness if you had said yes," he rejoined, "for, of course, I allow no risks to be run by anyone but myself. That is the work I do alone, and to-night I shall be glad if some of you will scrape me some lint."

"Good gracious! Then you think——"

"I want it to use for wadding. It is the lightest thing outside wool obtainable, and its resisting power is very great."

The lint was made that night from some linen provided by Miss Elegantine, who was an expert in the art of manufacturing it. She showed the inexperienced how to prepare it, and between them the boys got ready the requisite quantity.

In the night there was a shower of rain that was almost tropical in its violence. It was welcome as a cooler to the earth, and it was of immense service to the farm crops.

"All the little potatoes," groaned Dawson, "will be ruined."

Little did he think they would never be eaten.

"You don't say so?" cried Dibble, who was particularly fond of that tuber.

"Yes," moaned Dawson, wringing his hands, "they will now turn into big ones."

"Yah!" exclaimed the disgusted Dibble.

"For playing up that old joke," said Terry, "Dawson ought to have two years' imprisonment, and Dibble, for not knowing about it, is a promising candidate for the asylum for idiots."

"Is it an old joke?" inquired Dibble.

"Older than the monuments of Rome," said Terry. "Older than——than——"

"The potato," suggested Dibble, and scored one on Terry.

They were preparing to go down to watch at a safe distance Morse carry on the work of fixing the blasting powder on the shore side.

When he got to the other side he would be invisible, unless they took a boat and rowed out to him.

They ranged themselves on the higher ground facing the spot, and every member of the camp was there.

Even Mr. Farrell had put in an appearance—"with the hope of seeing something go wrong," it was suggested.

Morse had a small bag with him from which he care-

fully extracted a long, thin cartridge, and gently inserted it into one of the holes.

"The powder," was the whispering comment that passed around.

Grain by grain, as it seemed to the spectators, he pushed the cartridge home, and paused to rest.

They saw him draw a deep breath, as if he had held it all the time the truly dangerous task was being performed.

His next movement was to insert the fuse, which was as slender as a common thread, but seemingly as stiff as wire.

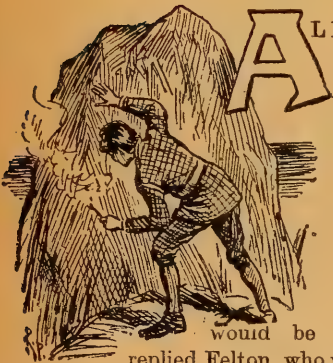
He ran it home, and then began to insert the lint, and with a thin wooden stick, as a rammer, gently forced it home.

It would have been tedious work watching him if they had not known how perilous it was to perform. That knowledge kept them lingering there the greater part of the day.

When night came he had finished off one cartridge only; but, as he told them, as they sat around the spread on the ground at tea-time, "even he felt nervous, and that made him slower than he would otherwise have been."

CHAPTER CCXCII.

LIFTED.



ALL safely prepared," said Morse, as he came into the chine with a swinging step on the afternoon of the sixth day since he left the camp of the Hidalgo. "Anything been seen of Jim?"

"He said he would be here before dark,"

replied Felton, who was addressed. Trimmer was in his company, and together they hastened on to the farm.

After the first two holes had been prepared for blasting, Morse worked out of sight. Hence it arose that he had no spectators on the shore. There was also a lot to be done to receive the Hidalgo, who was coming on the morrow, with fitting ceremony.

And Jim was coming home to assist in these preparations. Wild-flowers, many equal to our hothouse productions, abounded on the island, and vast quantities had been collected during the day to weave into ropes and garlands wherewith to deck their little camp.

In place of cord and twine they had the tendrils of

the strong forest creepers, strong enough for the purpose. From tent-top to tent-top swung the flowery ropes, which were intertwined here and there with a very pretty effect.

Around the tents, also in serpentine fashion, they twisted the strings of flowers, and garlands were hung from the trees, close to the spot on which the camp was pitched.

The effect was very pretty, and Morse promised to add to it on the night of the morrow, when their august visitor would be with them. What he intended to do he did not say.

Jim came into camp about nine o'clock, and met with a royal reception. Speaking of the morrow, he said the Hidalgo was so impatient for the spectacle of blasting the pinnacle, that he wished to see it done prior to visiting their camp.

"What of his own blasting?" quietly asked Morse.

"He says he will postpone that till after you have finished," replied Jim, "and he is confident of accomplishing it with startling ease and success."

But Morse only smiled.

"If the Hidalgo thought he could accomplish his purpose without drilling for blasting, he must either be in possession of some very novel material, or has a novel way of using things."

"He is horribly in earnest," said Jim; "seemingly he has rested neither day nor night since you went away."

Jim spoke warmly of the treatment he had received among his new friends, for he had learnt to look upon the attendants in that light, so entirely had they been devoted to his service. But he was nevertheless constrained to admit that he did not understand fully either master or men.

"They are unlike anything I ever met with or read about," he said.

"Just my opinion," remarked Morse.

Up to midnight the preparations went on, until in the light of the moon the tents were one mass of flowers of every imaginable hue.

"It is pretty enough for just anything," was the general enthusiastic comment.

There was some anxiety about the weather as the wind rose, and a few clouds were seen scudding across the sky. But if bent on raining they reserved the downpour for elsewhere, and after a dry night there came a peerless morning.

The Hidalgo was not expected until noon, for he travelled leisurely.

"And don't forget," said Morse, as the boys set out for the mouth of the chine, the place of rendezvous, "that he must be very careful with that powerful explosive of his. The least jar might stop the coming of either him or his men by scattering them in atoms over land and sea."

"You are sarcastic," remarked Jim.

"A little bit so," answered Morse.

They arrived at the appointed place of meeting in good time, and the Hidalgo was very punctual. He would naturally, barring accidents, be so as a matter of courtesy.

They saw him coming at the head of his men, who were toiling along with the tents and camp paraphernalia under the hot sun, pouring down its rays strong enough to "bake a nigger," as Terry said.

The boys and men ranged themselves in a double line, with Jim and Morse to the front, and in response to the salute of the Spanish noble, every hat and cap was raised.

"I salute you," said Gonsalvo Toreomez, as he gave a hand each to Jim and Morse.

Close behind him was Anselmo, bearing a box about six inches square before him, as a nobleman in waiting might carry a royal crown. He did, indeed, show to the box all the respect due to the richer article, and was especially careful lest he should drop it.

"My compound," said the Hidalgo, waving his hand towards it.

"Is it your intention to place it at once?" asked Morse. "Perhaps your excellency will be pleased to give the first display."

"No; after you," was the polite rejoinder.

"My work is done," replied Morse; "there is nothing to do but to light the several fuses."

"I am all impatience to witness the outcome of your labours," said the Hidalgo.

He spoke honestly enough, as his face indicated. There was no doubt he was keenly interested in the matter.

So the whole party moved forward, and, by the advice of Morse, halted two hundred yards short of the spot where the Black Pinnacle stood awaiting its fate.

A camp-stool was provided for Gonsalvo Toreomez, and he sat down. His retainers withdrew to a distance in the rear, and the friends of Morse ranged themselves behind the nobleman.

Morse, with his easy gait, walked on to the spot, waded through the short distance of shallow water, and disappeared round the back of the huge rock.

He was there but a minute, ere he reappeared with a slow match burning in his hand.

Deliberately he ignited the fuses that were in sight, and coolly blew upon them to make sure that they had caught.

The excitement among the boys was intense, and there were murmurs of apprehension from the men.

"He runs things too close," said Martin. "Why does he not come away?"

"Morse knows exactly what he may do, and what he may not do," said Jim.

Morse was in no hurry.

As he recrossed the narrow band of sea he looked back more than once to assure himself that the fuses were burning correctly. From each a small thin line of smoke was rising in the still air.

As he reached the shore there was a general sigh of relief, and on the lips of two or three there arose a cry for him to run. But the would-be warners stifled it, and they allowed him to come on at his own pace.

He came up to them at last, and although he had exhibited wonderful nerve, they could see that he was pale with excitement.

"Your fuse burns slowly," remarked the Hidalgo, critically.

"It is as well," replied Morse; "slow and sure until the great moment comes, is my motto."

"I prefer a rapid fuse," said the Hidalgo; "it burns more surely."

"In a few moments from now," said Morse, "I shall be able to show you the little I can do."

The Hidalgo leant back in his chair and surveyed the rock with the air of one about to witness something he was interested in, without the idea of being startled.

The moments passed, and they lagged as usual.

The smoke of the fuses disappeared.

"They have gone out," said the Hidalgo.

Morse did not answer him. He had not the time, for suddenly the big rock was seen to lift bodily and then split into untold pieces that were mostly hurled seaward, where they fell into the rippling water with a series of splashes, unheard in the roaring and echoes attending the blasting.

The thing was done, and well done. One of the Black Pinnacles had disappeared as completely as if it had been sawed off on a level with the sea.

CHAPTER CCXCIII.

THE HIDALGO MAKES HIS EFFORT.



"I MUST confess," said Gonsalvo Toreomez, when the cheering had subsided, "that it was very creditable—a very pretty display of what I may call one of the minor explosives at work."

"I own it is faulty," replied Morse, modestly, "but you will remember, excellency, that it is my own invention, and

I am but a beginner."

"I assure you," answered the Spaniard, politely,

"that I am only too willing to make allowances. For your age you are a good son of science. Anselmo!"

"Your excellency."

"Advance and follow me with my great World Destroyer."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Morse, under his breath, "is that the name he has given it? Now, Jim, hadn't you better go back a bit?"

"If you think it necessary," said Jim.

"I think," said Morse, "that we had better retire another hundred yards."

The Hidalgo, with Anselmo bearing the little box behind him, marched down to the pinnacle that was left standing, but drew up on the border of the sea.

There he was seen to confer with Anselmo, who having bowed respectfully, placed the box carefully on the sand, and presented his back to his master.

Gonsalvo, the Hidalgo, gravely mounted thereon, and was borne away to the rock with dry feet. A sound of chuckling was heard among the boys.

"Be quiet," hastily cried Morse; "for your lives don't laugh."

But it was just the sight that was likely to tickle the youngsters, and they were sorely taxed to retain their gravity.

Anselmo deposited his master on the rock, and returning to the shore, picked up the box, and likewise bore it to the pinnacle.

Then ensued another discussion between the Spaniard and his retainer. It appeared to bear on the question of the proper place for the explosive.

They went peering about, and Anselmo put his eyes to sundry crevices, as people do to the glasses in a peep-show. So did the Hidalgo, and they afterwards discussed the merits of the places they respectively examined.

It was a tedious affair, the Hidalgo being in no hurry, and there was some shifting about on the part of the spectators.

"I must say," growled Turner, "that he takes his time."

"He is the best judge of the necessities," replied Morse. "What might serve me may be of no use to him. Don't be impatient."

"They are getting out the powder!" excitedly exclaimed Dibble.

"They are," chorused several voices.

And as the spectators of a slow game of cricket become suddenly interested in a bit of free hitting, so was their attention once more aroused.

The Hidalgo took sundry packages from the hands of Anselmo, who bowed deeply every time he handed anything, and one by one they were placed in a crevice of exceptional size. The Hidalgo finally pushed them all home, with a fuse in company, and asked Anselmo for a light.

The boys could not hear the question asked, but they knew what it was by the prompt production of matches by Anselmo.

The Hidalgo struck one and placed it close to the fuse.

The way it flared up and burned away was terror-inspiring.

"Run!" yelled a dozen men and boys, unable to restrain themselves.

"What is the good of shouting?" asked Morse; "he will take his time."

The retainers of the Hidalgo squatted on the sands, smoking and chatting together. They exhibited no alarm, or even interest in the fate of their master.

Nor was Anselmo visibly terrified.

In company with his august leader he walked to the edge of the rock, and there he slipped gently into the sea. Again did the Hidalgo sit astride his back.

Then, as they started, the supreme moment arrived.

And what happened?

Did the second Black Pinnacle rise in the air and fly up to the sky?

No; it was not even shaken.

From out of the crevices there rushed an amount of fizzing flame that reminded the spectators of a very fine squib, and it speedily burnt itself out.

Then nothing but smoke was left.

The Hidalgo was landed on the shore, and he turned his face towards the scene of his ghastly failure. But he was in nowise disturbed.

And the respectful Anselmo was as cool as ever.

They were seen to confer yet again, and the hand of the Hidalgo swept frequently towards the rock.

Finally he brought out a document from his breast and carefully perused it.

As he drew near the end of it he started and stopped with a visible great surprise.

Laying a finger on it he called the attention of his attendant to a certain line, and Anselmo also started and raised his hands in astonishment.

Then they came on, and the Hidalgo rejoined the boys with only the feeblest signs of vexation on his face.

"Owing to a mistake in the quantity of the chief ingredient," he said, "I have experienced a comparative failure. My next effort will be more satisfactory."

He was not dismayed or disheartened by his non-success. There was no sign of humiliation in his courtly bearing, and it was not for well-mannered people to laugh.

So Morse sympathetically expressed his regret in the name of all there, and hoped to see the next effort of the Hidalgo's crowned with complete success.

"And if you are willing," added Morse, "we shall

be glad of your excellency's company in our modest camp."

The Hidalgo bowed his assent, and taking Jim's arm, bade him lead him thither.

With faces too solemn to be the outcome of genuine gravity, the boys fell in the rear, and, with the Spanish servitors, the whole party marched up the chine.

CHAPTER CCXCIV.

THE BOOM OF A GUN AT SEA.



HIS EXCELLENCY was delighted with the camp, and on his declaring that a lady's hand must have been employed in the decorations, Jim seized the opportunity to introduce Miss Elegantine. If she had been a princess the Hidalgo could not have been more courtly in his bearing.

He took her hand, raised it to his lips, and escorted her to a chair standing by the tent, set apart for his use.

Suddenly another stranger was espied by the Spanish nobleman.

It was Charley. He had been sleeping away the morning in a shady corner, and was now on his way back to welcome his friends.

"Anselmo," cried the Hidalgo, "my gun."

It was explained to him that the bear was as tame as a kitten in a general way, and he countermanded his order for the weapon.

"Though doubtful if ever wild beast is truly tamed," he said, politely, "I accept your assurance."

Gracious bearing could no further go. He did not like the bear, but as a guest he would not demur to its presence. But Jim seeing this, called for Romeo and bade him lead Charley away.

"Chain him up while the Hidalgo is here," he said.

"What me chain him to?" asked Romeo; "dere nuffin' but de trees."

Charley seemed to understand how things were like, for a burning desire to conciliate the nobleman took possession of him.

As Romeo hurried back to get his chain and collar, Charley stood on his hind legs and respectfully saluted the Hidalgo, by blowing a kiss with one of his paws. It was a trick Jim had taught him to perform in the company of Eveline.

Then he went through the rest of his programme,

turning somersaults, going through the drill exercise with a stick, and, in short, quite captivated the nobleman, who applauded and laughed until the tears ran down his furrowed cheeks.

"Truly a gentle jester among beasts!" he cried. "Bring the creature hither."

Romeo now appeared with the collar and chain, but was desired by the Hidalgo not to deprive Charley of his freedom. So he went back again, and the gentle beast, having gravely shaken hands with the Hidalgo, lay down like a dog at his feet.

Jim gave him the brief history of the animal, where he had been found, and how he had comported himself as a friend and a foe.

"His instinct is unerring," said Jim; "once a friend, always a friend with him. But if he makes you a friend, your foes will be his."

"A noble animal, indeed," said the Hidalgo.

During the afternoon the boys amused their guest and his followers with exhibitions of their activity.

The Spaniard, as a rule, is not given to exercise himself more than he is obliged to, and he numbers among the wonders of the world the desire of the Briton to exercise himself on every available occasion.

That they should run races in the heat of the afternoon especially astonished the Spaniards, and that they visibly enjoyed them was more astounding still.

The Hidalgo expressed himself highly gratified by everything—the short and long races, high and broad jump—in short, whatever they did he was pleased with.

They could not give him so good a dinner as he provided for himself, and their shortcomings in that respect were duly explained and most graciously declared to be of no moment.

Indeed, the Hidalgo partook of their rougher fare with a relish he had not displayed at his own table.

It was plain that the change and society of the young people were beneficial to him.

"For years and years," he said to Jim and Morse, when they sat without after dinner, "I have lived almost alone with silence for my companion. Bright faces, joyous voices, have been in a sense strange to me. They come back to-night like some half-forgotten beautiful dream. I am as one who finds youth again."

They expressed themselves glad to hear it. Despite his melancholy, they were strongly drawn towards him; Jim, at least, was especially so, and his years did not make him less a companion to the guest.

For the beautifying of their camp by night Morse had prepared sundry materials for the production of coloured light, and entrusted the display of the same to Terry, Trimmer, Brodie, and others. The show now began.

From afar, down in the chine, but within the line of sight of the Hidalgo, there sprang up a soft glow of

red that increased and spread until the whole of the flower and fern-beautified spot was bright with light.

And the illumination was not marred by smoke, as is generally the case with coloured fires.

Clear as the sunlight it shone, changing its hue to green, then to yellow, then to blue, and finally to a pearly white, each change watched by the delighted Hidalgo, and commented on with the fervour of a pleased critic.

The chine lost its light and was in darkness again.

Then from the right and left sprang up other sources of illumination, throwing up the camp decorations in bold relief.

Rapid changing of hue was now the order of the hour. Red on this side, yellow on that, blue, green, purple, orange, and other colours succeeding each other so quickly that it seemed as if they were mingled together.

It was better than mere fireworks, so soft and luminous was the light. It turned the spot into fairyland, no matter what the colour, and the final display was every hue alight at one time, producing the effect of the chine being seen through a gigantic prism.

Led by their master, the Spaniards applauded rapturously, and those of our friends not engaged in the display were not slow in expressing their approval.

In this exhibition Morse had excelled himself.

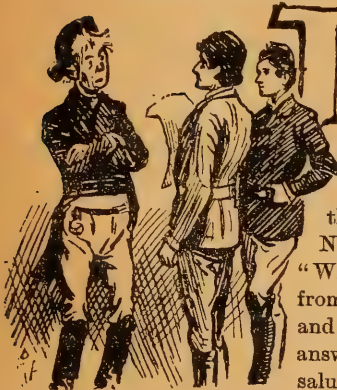
Darkness, or what seemed to be darkness, followed, and the sound of voices died away.

After the excitement there was a silence that lasted for a few moments, and then it was broken by a deep and solemn sound.

The boom of a gun at sea!

CHAPTER CCXCV.

A SURPRISE FOR MORE THAN ONE.



THE sound in itself was nothing portentous, but the possible significance of it startled all the more youthful in the camp.

Naturally the query, "What is it?" passed from mouth to mouth, and nobody was able to answer it. Was it a salute or a signal?

The Hidalgo Gonsalvo Toreomez knew nothing of it. He was quite certain that he was not in any way associated with the sound, nor did it proceed, in his opinion, from the deck of a war vessel.

They waited for some time, but there was no repetition of the sound. By-and-by it was assumed to be a signal of a revenue boat to a consort engaged in chasing a smuggler.

Matters settled down quietly, and the Hidalgo, with his two favourite friends, Jim and Morse, sat late.

His talk was chiefly of explosives and their use, and Jim was pleased to find that his failure in the competition with Morse had not materially disturbed him.

"How I could be so foolish as to make the error I did," he said a dozen times, "passes my comprehension."

"Even Morse may make a mistake some day," remarked Jim, consolingly.

From explosives the mind of the nobleman turned to his Seville home, and he extended the invitation to Morse in person, and was so earnest in his way of giving it that a refusal was impossible.

"Two of you will be companions for each other when I am locked in my chamber unravelling those great problems that are ever in my mind."

He seemed to have forgotten that he had already intimated to Jim that he wished Morse to accompany him, but such lapses of memory are common to all learned minds, and they let it pass.

Of course they waited until the Hidalgo turned in, which he did not do until past midnight, and all but themselves were asleep.

They accompanied him to the door of his tent, and his last words were:

"How I came to make the mistake I did passes my comprehension."

Jim and Morse sauntered a little way up the chine. Neither felt much inclined to sleep.

Their talk was of the guest, and Jim, in commenting on his failure, declared that he could not understand it.

"I can," said Morse, in his dreamy way; "we all make mistakes, you know."

"There is something about this Hidalgo I cannot understand."

"There is about everyone you meet something that is hidden. Remember that, Jim."

"Do you think seriously of going to his castle?"

"Why not, Jim? We can go home in a round-about way, and I daresay we shall find the place interesting."

"But if he should be successful—too successful, I mean—with one of his experiments?"

"He won't harm us, Jim," was the confident reply.

From this it may be gathered that both had a conviction in their minds that the end of their island life was approaching. Indeed it was, and it was closer than they anticipated.

"We shall miss the fellows and they will miss us," said Jim, thoughtfully.

"All through life we are meeting or parting with somebody," philosophically replied Morse. "It is a great thing to be able to retain *one* friend."

"I cannot part with you old fellow."

"Nor I with you, Jim."

"If you go to Burmah, so must I."

"And if you cannot go I will remain where you are."

Utterances like these from their lips were equivalent to vows. It was barely possible for either to forget the other. The tie between them was stronger than the links of a chain.

While talking they had sauntered half-way down the chine. There was a moon about a third of the way in the heavens, and it cast a strong light into the romantic place.

Glancing down towards the shore, they were startled on seeing the figure of a man approaching. A moment later their astonishment ceased, for they recognised Mr. Farrell.

All day long they had not seen him. For obvious reasons he was not eager to have another interview with the Hidalgo, and had been spending many hours alone.

He stopped short on seeing the boys, and said :

"Not in bed yet ? You keep bad hours."

The tone was the old one, that of a head-master's reproof. Jim replied to him quietly :

"The Hidalgo did not retire early."

"What is he ? I know no Hidalgo where discipline is concerned." He paused, and looking back towards the sea, presently remarked : "We shall have visitors in the morning."

All this seemed erratic talk. Was the mind of the man really unhinged at last ?

"A British vessel," he went on, "has anchored off the lagoon. There is music on board, and I believe dancing. To-morrow it is my intention to make a charge against you of having destroyed my school, and robbed me of property found on the island. You will not find Englishmen so ready to be bamboozled as that Spanish fool."

An English vessel off the lagoon ! That might prove to be good or bad for them. But the announcement explained the sudden change again to the old bearing. In his dogged, foolish way he meant to fight them to the last.

"How do you know it is a British vessel ?" asked Jim.

"By the tone of the voices on board," was the reply. "Though I could not catch the import of the words borne to me on the light breeze, I could recognise our tongue."

"There is yet time to make peace with us," said Jim, warningly.

"I make peace with *you* ?"

"Yes, Mr. Farrell. Your school was wrecked by your foolishly making enemies, whom in your weakness you were not fit to cope with. *We* have saved our own lives, which *you* would have freely sacrificed to save your own. Trust me it is not our intention to let you ride roughshod over us."

"I am not to be intimidated by threats," said Mr. Farrell.

"I am not threatening, but merely warning you. Behave well to us, and we will shield you. But if you claim aught that is in our possession, discovered by us and transferred to our keeping by the Hidalgo in the name of the Spanish Government, you will have to fight us in an English court of law."

"The Hidalgo first transferred the whole island to me," said Mr. Farrell, violently. "I hold a document which cannot be disputed. Once having given it he cannot take it away again."

"May I see that document ?" asked Jim.

"That you may destroy it ?"

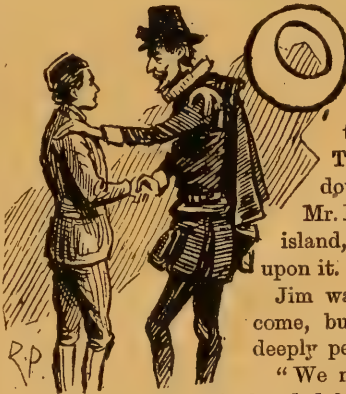
"A base thought, sir, and worthy of you !"

"You *shall* see it !" hissed the schoolmaster, wrenching a packet from his pocket.

He handed it to them, and stood by with folded arms, while by the wondrous light of the moon Jim and Morse deciphered the writing, which was bold and clear.

CHAPTER CCXCVI.

ALL SORTS OF ARRIVALS.



ONLY a few words, but how fraught with a complete upsetting of all their possessions ! The Hidalgo had undoubtedly first made Mr. Farrell master of the island, and all therein and upon it.

Jim was completely overcome, but Morse was not deeply perturbed.

"We may fight you even on this," he said, as he handed back the document. "I have every reason to believe that it must be ratified by the Prime Minister of Spain."

This was a blow for Mr. Farrell, who had not thought of that contingency. He assumed a more humble air as he replaced the document in his pocket.

"Perhaps a division, half and half, would be the better thing," he said.

"No," replied Morse, abruptly. "But I will make one stipulation. It is that we make no further

attempt to settle things here, but wait until we arrive in the Old Country. Thither we will, on the first opportunity, transfer our private possessions."

"And the acquired property of the rest?"

"No. It has been given to our companions, and with them individually you must settle. There is nothing more to be said now, Mr. Farrell. Good-night."

They passed on, and the schoolmaster, with a feeble assumption of his early hauteur, sauntered on to his tent, which was as before shared by Chorker and the three niggers.

Jim was furious.

"The Hidalgo is a fraud!" he exclaimed.

"Nay, Jim," interposed Morse, "do not make hasty remarks of a condemnatory nature on the old man. He gave Farrell that document when he believed him to be an injured man."

"But he said nothing about it to us."

"He may have forgotten it."

"Not at all likely!"

"The most unlikely things come to pass. Now, shall we turn in?"

Jim was agreeable, for he was now getting to feel tired as well as angry, and they accordingly slowly retraced their steps.

Morse must have been truly a great philosopher, for he was not the least disturbed, but lay down and fell asleep as if nothing had happened to disturb him.

Half inclined to think that many of the events of the previous night were the outcome of a dream, Jim awoke, and finding that most of the people in the camp were already stirring, he dressed as speedily as he could and went forth.

Morse was gone, they told him, to get a view of the strange vessel from the cliff, and as he had been absent more than an hour, his return might speedily be looked for.

The Hidalgo was still sleeping; so was Mr. Farrell. Jim was in a moody frame of mind, and when Morse was seen coming up the chine, he went to meet him.

"It is an English steamer," said the latter, "with a lot of bunting displayed about it. It looks to me as if we had a holiday lot come here on a visit."

"An excursion to Fermentera! Impossible!"

"I only tell you what I think. There is certainly nothing warlike about her. The Hidalgo was right so far."

On their way back they passed the Spanish retainers, busy with their cooking. Anselmo was making merry over his master's failure of the day before. They were able to understand much of what he said, and Morse quietly smiled.

"So much for faithful followers," said Jim, bitterly.

"The man is no worse than the rest of the world," returned Morse. "Should not we all have laughed

yesterday, but for one thing? It was a question of good manners."

"The Hidalgo is not a man to be laughed at."

"I agree with you there." And Morse was perfectly sincere when he made that declaration.

"With regard to the gang of excursionists," said Jim, "we may as well hold aloof from them, I suppose?"

"Let all do as they please," advised Morse.

It seemed that the majority were for going down to see what was to be seen, and after some argument, Jim told them to do precisely as they liked.

Accordingly a strong party of youngsters, led by Terry, set out, making for the shore of the lagoon, where the visitors, if they landed at all, would set foot upon the island.

Dibble, Trimmer, Felton, Anthony Hillyard, Dawson, Brodie, and many others were of the party. Shortly after they were gone, Mr. Farrell came out of his tent, and Romeo brought him some breakfast.

He ate it in a dreamy frame of mind, as his face indicated. Not a word or a look did he exchange with anyone around him.

Seemingly he had forgotten all about the arrival of the vessel, for having eaten his food, he walked away in the direction of the wood beyond the farm.

Then the Hidalgo appeared, and having elaborately thanked Jim and Morse for their courteous hospitality, announced his intention of striking his tents and journeying back to the spot where he had left many things stored away in the cave.

"I am eager to return and prepare some material that will atone for my failure," he said.

He asked if there was not a shorter way back, and Jim explained that by ascending to the wood and journeying along by it down past the ruins of the old castle he believed fully two miles would be cut off.

Gonsalvo Toreomez called up Anselmo to receive instructions, explaining to Jim that the man was his guide in all the roads he took.

"In the matter of locality," he said, "he is a genius."

Anselmo, the very pink of civility, came up and received from Jim all needed instructions for the route, and as the Hidalgo partook but sparingly of food, the time for parting soon arrived.

"In taking my leave of you," said the Hidalgo, I must exact a promise."

"We will give it, if it can be kept," was Jim's answer.

"It is that you will visit me, if only for a few hours, in two days' time."

The promise was readily given by Jim, and Morse bowed his assent. Then, after a courteous leave-taking of the two friends, a gracious one of the men and

boys still in the camp, and a kindly one of Charley, the Hidalgo went his way.

Miss Elegantine he did not see. For some reason, she avoided him after their first meeting, and was practically in hiding in her tent when he departed.

"I suppose," said Jim, "that she fears he will make love to her."

But that was not the feeling that prompted her to hide away. By-and-by, when Jim was wiser, he understood her better.

As there was nothing else to do, Jim and those with him got out their rifles and gave them, what was never out of place—a cleaning.

They had almost forgotten the party gone down to the lagoon, and an hour afterwards the spectacle of Dibble racing up the chine came upon them as a complete surprise.

"Here's a go!" he cried, as soon as he could make himself heard. "*The very goer of goes.* What do you think?"

"I think that you have been running uncommonly hard," answered Jim, "and had better sit down and cool off before you tell us what the wonderful go is."

Jim could see that he was not the bearer of ill tidings, or he might have answered him differently. Dibble's aunt, hearing his voice, came forward and looked at him anxiously.

"You have been running for your life, Oscar," she said.

"Hardly so bad as that," he replied; "but I *have* bounded along to tell you the news. All sorts of unexpected people have landed on the island."

CHAPTER CCXCVII.

THE INVASION OF FRIENDS.



SCAR," said Miss Dibble, "explain yourself. I hate incomprehensible communications. Who are all sorts of people?"

"The three fathers that were expected long ago," replied Dibble with a gasp. "How do

you like that to begin with?"

"Very well indeed," answered Jim, who saw nothing to be alarmed at.

"And they have brought with them the three mothers!" almost yelled Dibble.

"Whose mothers?" demanded Miss Elegantine.

"Why, *theirs!*" roared Oscar—"Terry's, and Ganthony's, and Trimmer's—ha, ha! It *was* a staggerer to the three; and there were more staggerers for Rainstone, and Felton, and Brodie, and Dawson, besides a lot more."

"How were they staggered?" asked Miss Elegantine. "You are the prosiest of boys, Oscar. Tell all you have to say, and have done with it."

"*Their* fathers and mothers have come, too!" screamed Dibble, "besides aunts and cousins. It's a big excursion party, and Mr. Haze's tourist agent is here, and he was the first to land. He wants Mr. Farrell badly; and there is a big fellow with him who looks like a policeman in plain clothes. Where is Nap?"

The man was close behind him. He had returned from his stroll and come up unperceived.

His face was ghastly white.

"Haze here!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," replied Dibble; "but you mustn't mind what I said about the policeman. That was a joke."

"An unfortunate one," replied Mr. Farrell, "for many a true word, as I have often heard, is spoken in jest. Boys, you know I have treated you well?"

He was on the humble lay again. There was no answer.

"Stand by me," urged the schoolmaster, "and I will be your friend, as I—I have always been—in—my heart. Haze is a man so ready to find out evil in anything."

"He can't find it where it doesn't exist," said Miss Elegantine, sharply.

Mr. Farrell groaned.

"I see," he said, "you are all bent upon working my ruin. Gordon, Morse, I renounce all claim to everything. See here! the document that gives me the island, it is yours."

He threw it towards them, but Jim tossed it back again.

"Mr. Farrell," he said, "if you have done wrong it is not for us to condone it. We are not to be bought off. On the other hand, if you have a right to the island and all on it, we must yield to your claim."

"You are merciless!" cried the schoolmaster, bitterly.

"I suppose we had better go and meet these people," said Jim to Morse.

"I should think so."

Morse asked Dibble if Jim's friends were there, and received a reply in the negative. This was satisfactory, as they could approach the excursionists in an independent spirit.

"Now, Mr. Farrell," he said, "we are off. If you like to accompany us you may rely upon receiving fair play."

"Go and say what you please," replied the school-master, sullenly; and, turning on his heel, he walked away.

So they went without him, and on their arrival at the familiar spot in front of the ruins of the school-house beheld a most extraordinary scene. It was like a bit of a fair.

Haze's people do things thoroughly and well. All the requirements of the excursionists had been seen to, and there were tents and cooking apparatus, and servants to do the rougher work, and order reigned over all their labours.

Fathers, mothers, uncles, and other relatives were there, each with their own object of solicitude, from whom they were learning all that could be told in a hurry of the story of the island school.

Not the least conspicuous among them were the three fathers who had been expected long before, and Jim, singling them out, saw, to his great delight, that they were all on good terms with their sons.

Indeed, the general air was of wonderment mingled with pride.

Jim and Morse were sighted, and a ringing shout went up from the boys. It set their blood tingling through their veins, and as the elders crowded round them, uttering thanks for the pluck and generalship they had shown, whereby the lives of their boys had been saved, it was as much as they could do to bear up against the overwhelming emotions in their breasts.

They had to shake hands with everybody, not only once, but twice, and, in the case of Mr. Terry, thrice.

"Heroic—noble!" he said, "that is what I call your conduct, my boys."

At last, when all the feeling had gone out of the hands of the young leaders, thanks to the squeezing they had been subjected to, they were allowed a rest, and Romeo and Charley, the bear, came in for a full share of attention.

The latter was quite at home, and to show that he was willing to do his best to make it a happy day, went through his performance, with sundry additions—evidently inspirations of the hour—that delighted everybody, and robbed the most timid of any fears they might have had of his ferocity.

Macbeth and Hamlet were not noticed at first, but having seen Romeo introduced here and there, put themselves forward.

"It 'bout time dey made sumfin' ob us," remarked Macbeth.

"Dat so," assented Hamlet.

Accordingly, they went here and there, announcing themselves by name, and met with a cordial reception.

Then they went over to where some of Haze's attendants were preparing dinner, where they were not quite so well received.

But that was their own fault, for when they began to inspect the contents of saucepans, and make critical remarks on the nature of the cooking, the attendants, who knew their business, naturally resented it.

"Come out of that, you niggers!" roared a big, burly man, attired in the white garb of a *chef*.

Macbeth was holding up the lid of a saucepan, and Hamlet was endeavouring to see, through a cloud of steam, what was inside.

"Who am you redressing?" asked Macbeth, on his dignity in a flash.

"Why, you!" replied the *chef*. "Put that lid on! Do you want to spoil the soup?"

"He call dat soup!" said Macbeth to Hamlet, as he dropped the lid again. "How it strike you?"

"'Pears to me," said Hamlet, "dat dey make plate-washin's inter soup!"

"If you don't clear out," said the *chef*, wrathfully, "I'll make soup of you!"

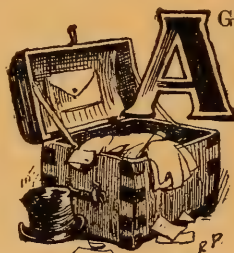
"For the pigs!" added another of the attendants.

"Yah!" cried Macbeth, contemptuously. "You do a lot, I dessay; but you come roun' de corner wif me for ten minutes, an' me make hash ob you, and den bet ten dollar dat not eben de dogs eat you! Come 'way, Hamlet. Dese 'ere white messers, dat call demselves cooks, make me ill!"

He walked away, followed by his son, and to show that they were not able to touch the stuff that was being prepared, selected a spot under the cliff, and rigged up a cooking apparatus of their own, with some sticks and an old boiler they fished out of the ruins hard by.

CHAPTER CCXCVIII.

TAKING THE BULL BY THE HORNS.



GENTS are generally smart men, and the one with the party was no exception to the rule.

He was a man of medium height, wiry as a ferret, and keen of eye as a hawk. Rarely was he still, being here, there, and everywhere in pursuance of his own duties, and seeing that nobody neglected theirs.

With the story of the island he declared he had nothing to do, but at the same time he was personally pleased with it.

"It is a matter between the Spaniards and yourselves," he said to Jim and Morse. "Our stay here is for three days, and when the time's up we make a move. All the boys who care to go back with us can

do so. Those who elect to remain cannot be forcibly removed. I have nothing to do with them."

This was said as the two friends sat in consultation in the afternoon with several of the fathers of the boys.

They were discussing the right they had to the things discovered on the island.

"The course I advise," said Mr. Terry, "is to remove them to England, and then acquaint our own people with what we have done."

"Our own people?" queried Jim, not quite grasping his meaning.

"Oh, let it get into the papers," said Mr. Terry, "and then if the authorities of Spain take it up, we can go to law. I shall fight for my boy's property, I can tell you."

"So shall I," said Mr. Felton, a thin, anxious-looking man, "and so would Mrs. Felton."

As the lady in question stood head and shoulders over him, it was thought that on her might devolve most of the fighting, but nobody said so much aloud.

"If you ask my opinion," said the agent, as he got upon his feet, "I would advise you to get everything on board *at once*. Take the bull by the horns."

"The question is," said Jim, "is it dishonest to take them away?"

"No," replied the agent, "no more than your taking valuable pebbles found on the seashore would be. You are dealing with property of a dead and gone people. There are no owners for it. The absurd law of treasure trove, which holds good in our own country, does not exist here. Findings is keepings, as we used to say at school."

"That settles it," said Jim, "and I vote for getting the things on board right away."

"All except your own," whispered Morse; "you are going with the Hidalgo."

"I shall send mine home," said Jim. "What is the use of being cumbered with a lot of luggage?"

"Right, Jim," said Morse, "and, if you don't mind, I'll get your people to take care of mine until we get back."

Mr. Terry undertook to see to the safe delivery of their valuables, and, as they would want money in Spain, he promised to send them on to the chief banker in Seville a banker's draft for a hundred pounds apiece.

"We can square up when you come home," he said.

Thus it was arranged that all the wonderful things unearthed by the boys on the island should be transferred to the vessel, which bore the appropriate name of the "Victor."

But prior to their being taken on board some packing and requisite marking had to be done, and with that they were busy all the rest of that day and far into the next.

Meanwhile Mr. Farrell had once more disappeared, and nobody seemed to care a straw.

The only remark made about his non-appearance was made by the agent, who said it would be as well for him not to go back to England, as he would there be open to actions-at-law for non-fulfilment of contract, if anybody chose to go at him.

"If they do," said Jim, "I shall make it my business to help him with his defence. Whatever he may have done he has bitterly paid for. It is impossible not to pity the man, when we see the change a few short months have made in him."

"More heart than head in what you say," remarked the agent, "but that is not to your discredit."

The captain of the "Victor" was a cheery old sailor, who had seen a lot of the changes and chances of life, and he was immensely delighted with the yarn of the Island School.

"But take my advice, lads," he said, "and don't try to make strangers believe you. Because they *won't*. I used to spin yarns, and the bigger truths they were the more I was voted a liar. They didn't use to tell me I was one to my face, but their eyes always betrayed that they didn't believe me. Be happy in the thought that your friends will believe you."

The transport of the bales of property was carried out without any mishap, save that Chorker's big bundle came undone as it was being hoisted on board, and a portion of the contents went down to the bottom of the sea.

But he had tied it up himself, refusing all assistance and advice from Martin, and had only himself to blame.

With the removal of the property the camp in the chine was broken up, and the boys brought their tents down to the lagoon.

The agent declared that they were unique specimens of their class of work, and were worth a lot of money.

He advised them to permit him, on his return to England, to dispose of them. He was sure that some of our millionaires would be glad to acquire such novelties in the tent line.

And thus it was arranged.

Then came Charley, the bear, and, as the intelligent brute could not be considered portable property, much exercise of mind was indulged in.

At last it was settled that he should go home in the vessel, and be taken care of by Mr. Terry until Jim returned to England.



CHAPTER CCXCIX.

THE HIDALGO ASTONISHES EVERYBODY.



GONSALVO TOREOMEZ had not been near the camp, and although much curiosity was felt concerning him, none ventured to approach his retiring-place.

The feeling of respect which prompted the visitors to hold aloof was inspired by the information that the Spanish nobleman was engaged in manufacturing some powerful explosive destined to shake the world. Among the mothers of the boys there were very decided views about going near so dangerous a man, and their fears would have extended to Morse, but for his assuring them that he had used up all his dangerous manufactures in the recent removal of the Pinnacle.

On the morning of the second day the Hidalgo must have risen very early, for when the agent, the first man up as usual, came out of his tent, he found the Spaniard measuring the dimensions of the camp with a long tape.

He was alone, neither his attendants nor anything connected with him being in sight.

Pausing in his work, he first of all regarded the agent with a dreamy air; but gradually there came a critical expression into his eyes, as if reckoning up his social status and general worth.

On the whole it was favourable; but it was the decision of a man who recognises a worthy inferior.

"Good morning to you, senor," he said, but without extending his hand.

The agent raised his hat and bowed.

"The Hidalgo Toreomez, I presume?" he said.

"The same," was the gracious answer.

"I presume I may welcome you, Hidalgo, to our humble camp?"

Again the Hidalgo was gracious, and signified his assent by a wave of the hand.

Thereupon the agent laid himself out to be agreeable, and diplomatically started in the complimentary line.

"Your fame as a great chemist has reached us," he said, "and we would have gladly paid our respects to you, but feared to interrupt your studies."

"I commend you for your consideration," was the answer. "I have indeed been deeply engaged. But I regret to-day that a terrible misfortune has come upon me."

The melancholy on his face deepened. The agent became sympathetic.

"That indeed is to be regretted," he murmured.

"I have perfected my newest explosive," said the

Hidalgo, after a pause, "and so powerful is it, that a pinch of it no bigger than a pea would scatter this camp in every direction."

"Indeed, Hidalgo! It must be very powerful."

"It is the most powerful composition yet discovered by mortal man. I made a pinch of it, and for safety's sake rolled it up in tinfoil. It was then no larger than an ordinary pill. Foolishly, while putting away some of my instruments, I placed it in my mouth."

"And it exploded, Hidalgo?" said the agent.

"Man," returned Gonsalvo Toreomez, sternly, "if it had done so, should I be here now? Would a fragment of my body be discovered anywhere?"

"I beg your pardon, Hidalgo. The moisture of your mouth ruined it?"

"Again you are hasty in coming to a conclusion. No moisture could reach it, so careful have I placed the tinfoil round it. No, no! Worse than that has to be told. I—I"—he paused a moment, and a slight clicking noise came from his throat—"I swallowed it!"

The agent rubbed his chin thoughtfully, as if puzzled. The Hidalgo went on:

"Mark you, now, my position. I have in my stomach a thing that will not digest. So far, good or bad. But"—again he paused, and once more the clicking sound was heard—"if I should fall, or thoughtlessly jump down from a limited height even with a jerk—nay; if anyone rubs violently against me—poof! the thing *will go off*! So sensitive is it that there will be no escape!"

The agent was alarmed now. His eyes came out of his head, and involuntarily he backed a bit. The Hidalgo followed him up.

"Was ever man in such a perilous position?" he asked, plaintively. "The monster Frankenstein created to be his bane was as nothing to this. *He* could fight his monster. I am helpless and at its mercy."

"Well, really," said the agent, "I hardly know what to advise you to do. An emetic——"

"Violent retching would suffice to bring about the catastrophe," interposed the Spaniard. "No; I must live with it inside me, patiently awaiting what it may bring."

"And is this why you left your camp?"

"Precisely," was the answer. "I love my faithful followers too well to live among them and jeopardise their lives. Besides, if they knew my secret, they would probably fly from me, and the same ending be attained. I therefore propose to abide with you for a while until I can decide on what course to pursue."

The Hidalgo walked on, and the agent retreated to his tent, where he kept until everybody was astir.

Then he came forth, and in confidence told one and another of the Hidalgo's misfortune, and started a perfect panic of fear.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.

The Island School.



"Good bye" are hard words at times to utter, but they had to be spoken, and at last Jim and Morse got into the boat which was to bear them away.

Thus matters were when Jim, the last up that morning, for he was very tired overnight, on coming forth, found Morse as the sole companion of the Hidalgo, while the rest were gathered together afar off, contemplating the pair with anxious faces.

CHAPTER CCC.

THE WORKING OF A PANIC.



NOT aware of the cause of this extraordinary state of things, Jim stared about him and saw the agent beckoning for him to approach. Jim went over to where he was standing in company with Mr. Terry and some of the other men.

"What's the matter with you all?" he asked.

The agent told him the dolorous story, and Jim was inclined to declare that it was all fudge; but happening to glance in the direction of Morse and the Hidalgo, he saw the former slowly moving away from the latter, leaving him standing with his arms folded and his head bent upon his breast.

"What's to be done?" asked Jim.

"I am sure I don't know," replied Morse, who was now near him.

"It is an awful business."

"Perfectly terrible."

"Haden't we better all get on board?" inquired the agent.

"You might take the women and the boys there," replied Morse, gravely. "It will be just as well. But Jim and myself, with the men, ought to stay and see him through it."

"You think there will be a calamity?"

"I can't say."

"I will ask him to leave the camp," said the agent emphatically.

"If you do," replied Morse, "he will probably fly into a passion and strike you. I need not tell you that a blow would——"

"I understand," hastily exclaimed the agent. "That won't do. Can he be persuaded?"

"I fear not. He seems to feel more safe among us than anywhere else."

"But, hang it!" said Mr. Terry, "we are not to be blown up because he feels like that."

"He is coming this way!" said Mr. Felton, in a terror.

"Don't run!" whispered Morse—"for goodness' sake, don't run! Suppose he should dash after us, as he probably will, what may not happen? Be calm,

and let him walk quietly among us. Jim, if you can give me a minute, I should like to have a quiet consultation with you."

"That's right," said Mr. Terry; "you two consult. If there is a way out of this miserable business you will find it."

"Come into our tent," said Morse.

Thither they retired, and as soon as they got inside Morse dropped the canvas at the entrance, and threw himself down upon his bed, hiding his face in his hands.

"Don't give way," said Jim.

"I feel I must," replied Morse, "although I don't want to. If I could only have my laugh out I should be all right, but now I feel as if I must burst."

"Your laugh!" exclaimed the amazed Jim.

Morse turned over, and showed that his face was quite red with suppressed laughter. It was reassuring, but at the same time Jim felt humbled. He saw he had been taken in.

"There is no danger?" he said.

"Ask yourself," said Morse, "if it is possible. Think of the heat of a man's stomach, the power of the gastric juices, and then think if *anything* short of wood or stone will effectually resist their action. Nay, would not the diaphragm of the stomach, the little muscular door that opens at the right time to allow all things to pass, permit so small a thing as the special pill the Hidalgo has swallowed go its way? He evidently knows nothing about anatomy."

"I am a duffer as well as the rest," said Jim.

"Oh, it is nothing. The strangest beliefs become rife under peculiar circumstances."

"It is an immense relief to me," said Jim, "and it will be to the rest when they know it."

"There is no need for us to hurry with the explanation."

"Morse!"

"Jim, old man, have I ever been given to practical joking?"

"Never that I know of."

"But when there is a good one going I enjoy it, don't I?"

"Do you mean to say that the solemn Hidalgo is joking?"

"No, he believes all he says, and therein lies the cream of the joke. He is my rival, as you know, and cannot I have a laugh at his expense?"

"Everybody believes it, too."

"Serve them right for being such geese. Dealing as it does with my favourite pursuit, I see more of a joke in it than you do, perhaps. For once in a way I want to enjoy it. We can scare all these people, you and I. There are too many ashore, and as they are really going away on the morrow, a few hours' earlier retirement on board won't hurt them."

"They won't all go. I saw it in their faces."

"All the better. The fellows we want will stay. Those who are afraid of the pill—ha, ha!—may get on board as soon as they please."

"What will you tell them?"

"Simply that I can do nothing to alter matters, which is the simple truth."

"Go out and tell them," said Jim: "you may be able to keep your countenance. I should fail."

Morse went out, and Jim, lying down, waited his return. He could hear a hubbub of voices, but was not able to distinguish their meaning.

In three minutes or so Morse was back again.

"Here's a go!" he said; "they have all veered round, and refuse to budge. Even the women stand their ground. They say it is un-English to fly away from anything or anybody. Chorker alone has suddenly found that he can make himself useful on board ship, and has gone back in one of the boats."

"And what of the Hidalgo?"

"He is mooning about, and wherever he is there everybody is *not*. Come out and see the fun."

Jim left the tent with his friend, and was just in time to see a meeting between the Hidalgo and the aged Macbeth. The latter was preparing an independent breakfast at one of the fires, and the Hidalgo, who had risen very early, and therefore in a very hungry condition, sniffing soup, drew near to make inquiries concerning it.

But Macbeth warned him with a threatening ladle to stand off.

"Keep away from dis chile," he yelled, "or sumfin' happen!"

"Alas," sighed the Hidalgo, "I am aware of it. Something *must* happen if you are violent, for no dog of a negro shall ever strike me unless I kill him."

Macbeth backed, and the Hidalgo, drawing up to the fire, took the lid off the small boiler suspended above it.

"Let dat 'lone dar, will you?" roared Macbeth. "Hamlet, whar am you?"

Hamlet was skulking behind an empty barrel a short distance away. He roared back that he wasn't coming along to do anything.

Then Romeo was signalled by his grandfather to advance. He was standing a short distance off, and to the surprise of Jim and Morse, he boldly advanced.

"Dribe him 'way from dat soup!" roared Macbeth.

"Your rexlency," said Romeo, "if you leab de lid off much longer de soup be sp'iled."

"That would be a pity," calmly answered the Hidalgo, as he replaced the lid, "for it is good as to odour. I should like a plate of it for breakfast."

"Your rexlency," said Romeo, "berrer go ober dere and sit in de shade. Den me wait on you 'cordin' to de lawful persion you hold."

Romeo was overpoweringly polite and wonderfully calm, although Jim fancied he saw that the negro's lip was quivering.

He escorted the Hidalgo to a shady spot near where the old post-office once stood, and there placed him a chair.

Next he hurried away to a tent, and speedily reappeared with a small table, on which he laid a cloth. In short, he prepared a very excellent spread for the guest, and in due time, when the food was served, waited on him with an unruffled air.

Meanwhile eating had become general, but appetites had fallen off somewhat. Every eye was on the dangerous guest and his unmoved attendant, whose coolness and bravery under very trying conditions, as was assumed, excited general admiration.

"What do you make of it?" whispered Jim to Morse.

"Nothing," was the soft answer. "It beats me entirely."

And indeed it puzzled them both to see the calm way Romeo performed his duties, when he from his very nature must have been open to believe in the story of the Hidalgo from the sheer ignorance he was in on all matters appertaining to explosives.

But the fact could not be denied. He saw the Hidalgo through his breakfast, and then, to the immense relief of the main body of people in the camp, the Spanish nobleman was seen to rise and walk slowly away in the direction of the place where he had been recently located.

Then Romeo advanced and made an important announcement for the benefit of all whom it concerned.

"De Ridalgo," he said, "feelin' a bit disgusted wif de cool deception he meet wif, am going 'way and not trouble you more, 'at he be glad if Marse Morse an' Marse Jim Gordon be good 'nuff to follow him for a frenly word or two."

CHAPTER CCCI.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE HIDALGO'S SHIP.



MAN is a selfish as well as a gregarious animal; but there are noble hearts in which the sin is almost unknown. Notably this was so among the boys of the now broken-up and gone-for-ever school.

If it had been a question for most of the men alone, they would have allowed Jim and his friend to depart without demur. But their old chums, being made of more tender stuff, strongly objected to it.

"Shunt the Spaniard, Jim," said Terry, "and let us all get aboard. He will then have the whole island whereon to blow himself up, if he has a mind to."

"He has been too kind for me to desert him now," answered Jim, "and, furthermore, I have promised to go back to Spain with him."

"Oh, that's all tomfoolery!" cried a dozen voices. The whole batch of youngsters were crowded round the pair. "We won't let you go!"

"Really," said Morse; "one would think you are a lot of babies, instead of being those comrades of ours who shared a hundred perils with us."

He looked at them almost angrily, and they hung back a bit. But it was very trying work to Morse to have to keep his countenance under the circumstances.

"We mean to go, and there's an end to it," said Jim. "What have we to be afraid of?"

"A cool question," said Dibble.

Many of the elders added their expostulations, but the pair only laughed and went their way. Passing Romeo, Jim beckoned to him.

"Since you are so very brave, you may as well accompany us."

But here Macbeth and Hamlet, who were hovering around, intervened. They were not going to lose the apple of their eyes, if they knew it. He had done enough for the glory of his family, and could do no more.

"Come out of it, you two anclequakered old muffs!" cried Romeo, shaking them off. "If you am 'fraid ob gettin' a 'casional blow up, me am not."

Eventually, as Morse and Jim walked on, he bowled over his progenitors, one to the right and the other to the left, and hurried after his admired masters.

Overtaking them, he breathlessly exclaimed:

"Jess like 'em; got no pluck. 'Fraid ob ebery-ting."

"Romeo," said Morse.

"Yes, Marse Morse."

"How did you know it was perfectly safe to approach the Hidalgo?"

"Puffectly safe," repeated Romeo.

"You hear me, and for once you can abandon the nigger habit of repeating a question," said Morse. "How did you know it, I ask?"

Romeo looked ahead, to the right and the left, and finally at his interlocutor, who was walking by his side between him and Jim, and said:

"'Spect it berrer to tell the trufe, Marse Morse."

"It invariably is," was the calm reply.

"De fack am, Marse Morse, me listen when you was talkin' to Marse Jim in de tent. Me had a 'spicion in my buzzum dat de blowin' up wasn't possible."

"You show more sense than your betters," said Morse. "Are you accustomed to listening?"

"Nebber listen to you and Marse Jim afore, 'cept in de usual way."

"Very good. Then don't do it again. Give up listening when you are not expected to do so. It's mean."

"Me nebber do so no more, Marse Morse," said the repentant one.

As there were now three in the secret, they decided to end the joke on their return. Romeo was a very good sort of fellow, but in close matters he could hardly be trusted.

They found the Hidalgo resting under a tree, about a mile from the lagoon. He sat with his hands clasping his knees, and his face the image of the deepest dejection.

"To-day," he said, as they sat down beside him, "I expect the 'Toreo,' my vessel, here. It had escaped my mind until, when consulting my tablets, I found she was due."

This was a surprise, and their faces expressed it.

"Will it be too sudden for you to leave your friends?" he asked. "If so, there is no hurry, I can wait a day or two."

"Frankly," said Jim; "it would bean almost abrupt departure. But to-morrow our friends depart, and——"

"You would wish to leave at the same time?"

"Yes."

"So be it. My daughter will not object to remain a few hours on the island."

Here was another element of surprise, as fully indicated as before. But to all appearance he did not heed it.

After a silence, he turned to them and laid a hand upon each of them.

"If others shun me," he said, "you are not afraid. I honour you for it."

Jim was about to declare that there was nothing to fear, but a glance from Morse checked him. He could not understand why his friend should keep up the farce with the Hidalgo, but knowing he always had a motive, and generally a good one, he was dumb.

"It will please Ximena," murmured the Spaniard, "when she finds that I have had such brave companions."

They knew that in Ximena he was referring to his daughter, and hoped he would tell them more about her. Was she a girl or a woman, or between the two? They thought it more than probable she might be beautiful, for the wan face of the Hidalgo had undoubtedly once been handsome.

There was something about this very strange man that Jim did not understand. He liked him, and although he could not tell why, was sorry for him. The feeling was altogether indefinite.

Assuredly, it was difficult to connect this grave man

with the ludicrous incident of the swallowed explosive.

By-and-by, when they were on the way back to the camp by the lagoon to acquaint their friends of the expected arrival of the "Toreo," Jim suddenly said:

"Why not put the Hidalgo's mind at rest about that miserable little thing he has swallowed?"

"I tell you," replied Morse, earnestly, "that he would not believe us. Perhaps he will forget it."

"Forget it?"

"Yes, Jim. It is possible. I judge by his face that although he has never previously spoken of his daughter, that she is very dear to him, and her arrival may dispel all thoughts of it."

"You are more sanguine than I am on that point," said Jim.

When they got back no time was lost in clearing away the apprehensions of their friends, and the general relief was immense. There was some bitterness in certain quarters on the head of their having been secretly laughed at by Morse and Jim, but it did not last.

When the "Toreo" arrived it would probably drop anchor near the "Victor," and the idea of fraternising with those on board, and having a good time of it, was discussed. The agent, who was well-acquainted with Spaniards, as he was with many other peoples, undertook to arrange matters for an amicable time.

Then into Jim's mind there came thoughts of the missing Mr. Farrell, and he wished that the man was there; not that Jim had any personal liking for him, but it seemed a pity that there should be any doubt as to the fate of the meanest among them at the time. Furthermore, Jim reflected that he would hardly be able to see Eveline again if he had nothing better than a story of having left the broken man on the island, alone, to tell her.

He laid his views before several of his more particular chums, and the result was that they went in search of him, and in a few hours discovered him lying asleep in a shady corner near the farm, looking none the better for having lived, like a semi-savage, on the raw produce of the land, and sleeping in the open air.

On his being aroused, he was found to be in a state of terror about the reception he would get from the new arrivals, who, he was sure, would show him little mercy; but Jim assured him that he would be spared any further humiliation. Finally he was persuaded to indulge in a bath by the sea, and to brush himself up generally, and was taken back to the camp.

Morse went on ahead to prepare everybody for his coming, and the prevailing feeling when he arrived was commiseration for the miserable man.

Even the agent, who was not ordinarily impressionable, was moved to declare that whatever the sins and

weaknesses of the schoolmaster might be, he had paid dearly for them.

"He had no right to start on this island business," he said. "He is an all-round failure."

As Mr. Farrell was not inclined for any festivities, and physically in want of a long rest, he was easily persuaded to go on board the "Victor," and remain there pending the voyage home.

"I'll look after him," said the agent, "and see that he is safely restored to Mrs. Farrell. Between us all, I do not think he will live long. The man is shattered. There is the look of a general breaking-up about him."

It was late in the afternoon when the "Failure," as the schoolmaster was now called, was taken to the "Victor," and shortly after the "Toreo" arrived, and dropped her anchor within two cables' length of the English vessel, which received her with a friendly salute, fired from the one small gun on board.

CHAPTER CCCII.

XIMENA TOREOMEZ.



AS the Hidalgo had not arrived, Jim proposed to go on board the Spanish craft and explain to the captain matters concerning him, leaving out the explosive incident, of course.

Jim, in speaking of the captain, had the daughter of the Hidalgo in his mind, and Morse must have had her in his also, for he eagerly expressed his willingness to accompany him.

Refusing all escort, they took one of the small boats—part of the old school property—and pulled out, just in time to stop a boat from the Spanish vessel coming ashore.

They were received on board by a smart young officer, who gravely inquired their business, and on Jim's stating that he had news of the Hidalgo for his daughter, he was anxiously asked if it were good or bad.

"It is good," said Jim, "and he would have been here to speak for himself but for his being camped some distance away. But he is on the road hither, and will not be long, in any case, ere he arrives. I am here simply to lighten any possible apprehensions of the senorita."

"She is on deck, senors," said the officer, pointing aft, where, seated in a low chair, with her back towards them, was the young lady in question.

All that was visible of her was some dark hair, from which floated the graceful silk mantilla, and a portion

of a silk dress. Up to that moment neither of the friends had observed her presence at all, their attention being taken up by the fittings and crew of the craft, a private yacht of more than average size.

Everything about her indicated wealth and good taste. It was such a vessel as neither of the two young visitors had ever before set foot upon.

The officer advanced alone towards the senorita, exchanging a few words with her in a low tone, and quickly returning.

"The Senorita Ximena will be pleased to greet you," he said.

Feeling a bit nervous, the youths followed him to the aft deck, where she sat, and found all their expectations as to the beauty and grace of the daughter of the Hidalgo more than realised.

She was not more than sixteen, but, in common with her sex in Spain, was womanly for her years. Her face was oval in shape, her complexion of that olive tint which is always pleasing to the eye, with a deepening on the cheeks caused by the sun—a rich tan, that was to her what the rosy hue of health is to the English girl.

Her apparel was a shortish dress of black silk, with a scarlet sash of the same material about her waist. In her ears she wore a pair of small earrings, composed of some finely-worked gold, and each with a solitary diamond in the centre.

"You are welcome," she said, as she gave them her hand in turn.

A sailor brought up two chairs of the same sort as that on which she sat, and she motioned for them to be seated.

"You bring news of my good father," she said. "Is he well?"

"He is no worse for his stay on the island," replied Morse. "I trust you have no serious cause for apprehensions about his health."

The face of Ximena clouded over for a moment, but it quickly resumed its sweet, placid expression.

"He was not so well as I could wish when we parted. He reads and thinks too much. As to his bodily health, it was passing good, but tell me what he has been doing?"

As she addressed them both, leaving them to decide who was to supply the information she asked for, Jim left it to Morse, and he told her that on the island the Hidalgo had been amusing himself by making experiments.

"Oh, those experiments!" said Ximena, plaintively, "how I hate them! Yes, *hate* them!"

"May I ask why?" inquired Jim.

"Of what good are they?" asked the girl, with a motion of her hands that expressed more than words.

"Ask my friend here," said Jim, smiling; "he is always making them."

Ximena glanced quickly at Morse, and appeared to be surprised.

"I should have thought that he was too young for such folly," she remarked.

Then Jim, who was proud of Morse and his achievements, told her, despite the expostulations of the hero of the story, about the blowing up of the Black Pinnacle rock; stopping short, however, at that part of it where the failure of the Hidalgo entered into it.

"I hope the—what do you call it?—was not witnessed by my father?" she said.

"It was; but what is your objection?" asked Jim.

"It sets him thinking," replied Ximena. "You must promise me not to do such a thing in his presence any more."

Morse, who was addressed, faithfully promised to obey her. His fervour in making this declaration rather astonished Jim. Somewhat weakly, he let the cat out of the bag.

"They have, in a way, been rivals," he said, "but up to the present the Hidalgo has not been successful."

Ximena was neither hurt nor astonished. She seemed, on the other hand, to accept it as a matter of course.

"Will he arrive this evening?" she asked.

"I hope so," replied Jim, and then he told her of the plans that had been laid for the spending of a day or so with the party camped ashore. Finally he informed her of the invitation they had received to accompany the Hidalgo to his castle in Seville.

"You will be welcome—more than welcome," Ximena answered; "but there must be no experiments. You must take his mind away from them. After all, what good are they? Is it not better to build up than to blow to pieces?"

"Sometimes," said Morse, deprecatingly, "a little blowing up is necessary."

"With the tongue, as you English say," said Ximena, laughing, "and if you bring out your chemicals with their *fiz, fiz!* it will be for me to loosen my tongue. If you come to Seville you will be there to enjoy yourselves in the sunshine, and not hide away in dark rooms to poison yourselves with dirty smoke."

An attendant now appeared with a tray, on which were several bottles and a box of cigarettes. The former were filled with light wine, of which the guests drank a glass, but the cigarettes they did not accept.

"What, you not smoke?" exclaimed Ximena, surprised.

"We may by-and-by," replied Jim, "but at present we think of our nerves."

"Ah, that is what you English think of more than anything," said Ximena, "You want to get strong, so you work hard when you should be at play. You run and jump when you might keep still and rest

yourselves. So you grow up mighty men, and go all over the world."

"As the Spaniards did in the old days," replied Morse; gallantly, "when their nation held the world in its grasp."

"Ah! the old days," said Ximena, dreamily. "We were a people then. Now we are—but what matters? We have the sun, and the glories of the past are the food of our minds. Must you go?"

It was their first visit, and they prudently did not think it would be well to overstay their welcome.

"We have much to do ashore," replied Jim, "and if the Hidalgo arrives we ought to be there to meet him, for we are his only real friends. He has made no others among our people."

"Good-bye, then, until to-morrow," she said, as she held out her delicate brown hand. "Remember, no more experiments, and you will be welcome at Seville. Our home is old and vast, and gloomy, perhaps, but if you love the glories of the past, it will please you. Adios."

The young officer who had received them was at hand to see them back to their boat. But he scarcely seemed so cordial as he was on their arrival. On the score of politeness, however, nothing was lacking. Jim took the oars, and in pulling away, he of course had his face to the "Toreo." Half-way to the shore he fancied he saw the senorita glance over the side of the vessel, but it was a mere flash of a beautiful face that came and went in a moment.

Probably she saw he was looking in that direction, and did not care to let him see that she was interested in the visitors.

Morse, who was steering, or, rather, held the tiller-ropes in his hand, was in a musing mood. Jim spoke to him on some trivial matter, and got no answer.

He smiled, and was silent for a few moments, then in a louder tone suddenly inquired:

"Well, Morse, what do you think of her?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Morse; "did you speak?"

"Only been jawing to you unheeded for about ten minutes," answered Jim, with feigned scorn. "I asked you what you think of her."

"It is early days to give an opinion."

"That is evading my question. You could not look at a girl without thinking something."

"She is very beautiful."

"That is an answer."

"More beautiful than any picture I ever looked upon."

"That is an answer in full. You needn't say any more. Poor chemicals!"

"Poor what?" cried Morse, amazed.

"Poor chemicals," repeated Jim; "they will be neglected now."

"I have promised not to bring them forward in the

company of the Hidalgo, haven't I?" asked Morse, tartly.

"Certainly you have," dryly replied Jim; "to please a girl you have seen once, you abandon science. So I say again, poor chemicals!"

"I can put up with your chaff, Jim," said Morse, lightly. "Surely, if we go to Spain for a holiday, you would not care for me to be studying and experimenting all the time?"

"I should think you were a flat if you did."

"And do you not think that it will be well for the Hidalgo to have a rest?"

"Better for him if he gave up the thing altogether. He is too old to enter on a course of study now."

"Very well, then," said Morse; "don't give me any of your cheek and chaff, if you please. I shall study no more until after our visit to Seville."

"Meanwhile," said Jim, looking behind him, "you have been steering this precious boat anyhow and nohow. Where are you going to?"

"I beg your pardon," cried Morse, as he pulled the right-hand rope hard; "go ahead. I'll take you in straight enough now."

CHAPTER CCCIII.

THE LAST NIGHT ON THE ISLAND.



THE Hidalgo arrived within an hour, and after exchanging a few words with Jim, embarked for the "Toreo." He was brighter and more cheerful than he had been seen before since his coming to the island. The prospect of seeing his beloved daughter must have been the cause of it.

Being the last night on the shore, so rich with the stories of the past, all sat up late.

With fires burning to give light—warmth was not needed—they sat about in groups, and tongues getting loosened, many things not hitherto spoken of were told and discussed.

On the whole, the parents and friends of the boys were glad that the end had come. It made them shudder as they thought of the perils and hairbreadth escapes of the youngsters, and Miss Elegantine, who was a heroine among the women folk on the ground of having shared in the dangers, waxed eloquent on the merits of the two leaders.

"But for them," she said, "not a creature would be here to tell the tale. No two men on earth could have done more. Be grateful, all of you."

They were, and said as much. And it spoke well for the charitable feelings in the hearts of all that not

a single word was uttered in disparagement of the incompetent man who ought to have been the guide and protector of the boys, but had miserably failed in his duty.

The past was gone. So far as he was concerned, it was buried. And everybody had so thoroughly enjoyed the trip to the island that after all they felt it would be ungracious to speak ill of the real cause of all that had transpired.

Not the least agreeable signs of the general goodwill was found in the fraternising of Hamlet and Macbeth with the servants of the agent.

Whatever early heartburnings there may have been at the outset of their acquaintance, they were now laid aside, and brotherly love and good will prevailed.

Romeo sang some old plantation ditties that went down immensely, and Hamlet also gave them a song. Then Macbeth crooned a ditty about his Chloe, which was however cut short by his suddenly remembering that he had left her years ago under circumstances that would in England have handed her over to the charge of the parish.

"It no use singing 'bout de ole woman," he said, "so p'r'aps you like to hab de song 'bout de wall-eye mare dat me use to sing 'fore company in de masser's house."

They were agreeable, but the song was never sung, as Macbeth could get no further than the second line, owing to a failure of memory.

"Cur'us now dat am to tink on," he said, reflectively; "how de songs get out ob de head after once bein' dere. But it am a good song. You take my word for it."

There was a large party in the company of Jim, and some signs of sadness shown, for the boys felt that it was hard to part from one they had learnt to love so well. But they drew comfort from the belief that it would not be for ever.

"We shall often see you, old man," they said, "when you come back home."

"Yes, often—certainly," responded Jim, but he felt that in most cases the parting would be a long one, and perhaps for ever, for it is the way of life. We are together to-day, and to-morrow scattered here and there, one to the east and one to the west, travelling on opposite roads into the great unknown future.

Ximena was only casually mentioned once as the daughter of the Hidalgo. Neither of the pair who had visited her would make her the subject of a general discussion.

The women were the first to retire. Then the elders went, and by degrees the boys melted away until only Jim, Morse, and Terry remained. The latter was far from being so sprightly as usual. He was in a condition bordering on melancholy.

"This is the last night, Jim," he said; "no more of the island after to-morrow."

"Perhaps it is just as well to leave it now," replied Jim, "it is better than lingering until we are heartily sick of it."

"Whatever has happened," said Morse, "we must now think of it as a dream of wonder."

"And your adventures are not over," mused Terry; "you are going to Spain."

"Only for a short stay."

"One never goes to Spain without meeting with adventures, Morse."

"That is rather a wild idea."

"It may be, but I feel that you are going to see and hear things that will be a fitting finish, a glorious wind-up to your time here."

"It is a new thing," said Jim, "for you to have presentiments."

"Yes," assented Terry, "and therefore they are the more likely to come true."

"What most pleases your father here?" asked Morse.

"Next to you——"

"Oh, never mind me."

"To you and Jim, he is most tickled by the story of the three scientific fellows who were mistaken for him and his two friends. He will never cease to be amused by it, and it will become one of his stock stories."

"All dads," said Jim, "have stock stories."

"The last night here," sighed Terry again; "bother it!"

"You won't go to school at home, I suppose?" suggested Morse.

"Not if I know it!" said Terry, disgusted; "after this, do you think I could stand it? Dad thinks of getting me a post in one of the branches of his firm abroad. I call it his firm, because he has a high position in it. He isn't a principal, but holds a high confidential position."

"Then abroad you will go," said Jim, decidedly, "and good luck go with you."

"Thanks," returned Terry. "I shall not be happy unless I hear from you now and then."

"And you may rely on my writing," said Jim.

"And you, Morse?"

"I will not forget you, either."

They stood up, and then, without a preliminary word, Terry burst out with "Auld Lang Syne," and they sang it together in their clear voices, so that ere they had got far it was taken up by those within the tents, until the whole place seemed to be alive with the melody of the good old song.

Thus in fitting melody and music the last evening on the island came to an end.

CHAPTER CCCIV.

OFF AND AWAY.



WOULD that we had the time and space to describe in full that last day spent on the island, but we must be as brief as the subject will permit of.

The fraternising of the men of both vessels under the management of the agent became an accomplished fact.

All as they went off duty came ashore and became exceedingly merry. Good fellowship was not marred by the inability of the ordinary seamen to understand each other. They hobnobbed over their wine, and smiled and exchanged compliments to their entire satisfaction.

Early in the evening, the Hidalgo and Ximena, after spending a few hours ashore, went on board the "Toreo," and the signal was made to get ready to hoist anchor.

By that time the effects of the camps had been transferred to the vessels, and there was nothing for Jim, Morse, and Romeo but to say adieu and be gone.

It was a long parting, with much handshaking and expressions of good will. There was also the inevitable request that letters should be sent to those in the home country from those who were going to Seville.

All that had been said before and meant was said again and again. The youngsters were deeply moved.

"It is almost too much for me," said Terry, and his words were an echo of what was in the breast of others.

"Good-bye" are hard words at times to utter, but they had to be spoken, and at last Jim and Morse got into the boat that was to bear them away.

Even then they were not allowed to depart, and hands were again extended.

"Farewell," cried Johnny Daw, who was among the foremost; "I shall not forget the jolly time I have had with you. But the chances of our meeting again are very small. I shall be leading a sailor's life, going here, there, and everywhere, like all my breed, with no settled home, until I am too old to enjoy it, while you will be goodness knows where. Good-bye."

Changeling, Martin, and all the others — "too numerous to mention," were quite overcome, and the first named, to hide his emotion, bullied Macbeth and Hamlet for "making a fuss over parting with Romeo."

"Snivelling, are you?" he said to Hamlet; "what do you mean by it?"

"When you hab to part from a son like him, you will know all 'bout it," replied Hamlet.

"De light gone out ob my old age," declared Macbeth.

This was coming it a bit strong, considering all things, and even Romeo remonstrated.

"It a poor light," he said, "to be snuff out by my goin' away for a week or two."

Macbeth promptly dried his eyes and shifted to anger.

"Get way, you incrake," he said; "what de use ob me showing people dat we was a united fambly, when you must cut in and let 'em know dat we wasn't?"

And to the everlasting disgrace of Romeo, he simply grinned and hastened to the boat.

At the last moment the agent came up and exchanged a few words in an undertone with Jim.

"You needn't fear," he said; "your instructions will be carried out. The moment I see Mrs. Farrell I will give her your address, and the note goes to the daughter. We shall be home before any mail could reach them."

"And you will do what you can to make it all right with Mrs. Farrell in the other matter," said Jim.

"I shall have very little to do," was the reply; "she is a woman; and will remember that she took him for better or worse. Besides, I am sure that he will not trouble her long. The dream of his life is broken, and he cannot survive it for any length of time."

They shook hands, and in response to a gun fired from the "Toreo," the boat pushed off.

"Good-bye, Jim."

"Good-bye, Morse."

"Hurrah!"

It was not a strong cheer, for their hearts were full, but the waving of handkerchiefs made up for it.

Two long-boats from the "Victor" immediately began to fill with those for home.

"After all," said Jim, as their boat glided up the narrow neck of the lagoon, "it has been a quiet day for us."

"When the idea of its being made a sportive one was mooted," replied Morse, "I was sure it would be otherwise."

"There was so much to say to each other."

"And our hearts were rather heavy."

"The Hidalgo is not festively inclined."

"Did you see the impression made by Ximena, for all her being so very quiet?"

"I did. All the boys are clean gone in love—boyish love that lasts as long as the froth on a wave when it strikes the shore."

"Dibble's aunt fairly cried at parting."

"It was affecting all round."

So they conversed on the way, but when they boarded the "Toreo" they found the Hidalgo and

Ximena waiting to give them a welcome both warm and cordial.

They stood together by the stern watching the embarkation of the excursion party of the "Victor." Expeditiously it was carried out, and with all on board, the island was left uninhabited.

Charley, the bear, which had been on board the greater part of the day, suddenly appeared as far as his head and shoulders over the bow of the "Victor," and, rubbing his nose with a paw, whined loudly.

The sagacious beast knew that he was parting from two good friends, and this was his way of bidding them adieu.

It was almost ludicrous to see him, but Jim and his friend Morse took it seriously. They waved their hands to him, little thinking Charley would attempt to jump overboard.

But he did so, and it was well that those in charge of him were prepared to resist his efforts. A collar and a strong chain effectually restrained him.

It had been a calm day, and now the wind was rising in its contrary fashion out there. If lively by day, it was generally still at night, and *vice versa*.

There were orders shouted, and the moving of active feet round the capstan. Up came the anchors together, and at the same time the sails were shaken out and securely sheeted home.

A gun was fired on board each vessel, and just then the sun dipped, and the first gloom of coming night darkened the sea.

With a majestic sweep the two vessels bore slowly away from the shore, and then suddenly someone on board the "Victor" began to sing the popular song, "Isle of Beauty, Fare Thee Well."

"How sweetly pretty!" exclaimed Ximena.

Her guitar was lying on a camp-stool near her. Picking it up, she swiftly tuned the strings and played a light accompaniment to the song.

From one voice to many it increased in strength. All on board the "Victor" joined in; the strain was taken up on the "Toreo."

Jim, Morse, and Ximena—what a rich voice she had!—sang, the sailors chanted a bass to the air, without words, for they knew not the song, and even the Hidalgo crooned a soft third to it.

Then the gap between the vessels began to widen, for, in the fast-approaching darkness, the sagacious captains knew it would be dangerous to sail too near each other.

Softly subsided the song, until the voices on board the "Victor" had sunk down to a droning that was like the murmuring of an Æolian harp, until it died away, and the vessel was but a shadowy outline to Jim, who was now silently watching her.

It was a fitting end to their island life, the coming of peace after the turmoil and horrors of war.

He felt it was so, and over him there stole the soft feeling of melancholy allied with joy, which philosophers declare is the most delightful of all the emotions experienced by humanity.

A touch on the arm aroused him from a waking dream. It was Ximena by his side.

"Your friend and the Hidalgo have gone below," she said. "I am waiting for you to escort me."

"I beg your pardon," said Jim. "Have I been long in neglecting my pleasant duty?"

"It was nothing," she answered. "I watched your face. You were thinking. What matters how long?"

She took his proffered arm, and crossing the deck, they descended the companion leading to the Hidalgo's cabin.

As they disappeared, the young officer who had received Jim on the evening before came out from the shadow of the mast, drew a knife from its sheath, and kissed the blade fiercely.

The act was expressive and ominous. Unconsciously, Jim had gained a deadly foe, for Miguel Navarrez, first officer of the "Toreo," had given his heart to the Hidalgo's daughter, and even the rivalry of a boy half-maddened him.

CHAPTER CCCV.

A NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN VOYAGE.



BENEATH the light of the stars sailed the "Toreo" before a brisk breeze. Her commander was a taciturn Englishman, named Barnett, who a few years before had been captain of one of the great liners. But, having had the misfortune to run down a vessel in a fog, and getting the blame of it—which he did not entirely deserve—he lost his certificate.

Once a captain loses his ground among British shipping as a commander, he may whistle for a berth, and it will not come; so Captain Barnett, knowing this much, sought and found employment with the Hidalgo.

It came about this way:

The "Toreo" was built by a Clyde firm for the Spanish nobleman, and they were asked if they knew of an English officer who would take charge of her.

They knew Captain Barnett, appreciated him as a seaman, and knowing the real circumstances of the disaster that brought about his downfall, they selected him for the post.

The Spaniards on board being, like the majority of their countrymen, great chatters, called him the Silent Captain.

Jim and Morse supped with the Hidalgo and Ximena in the cabin, which was furnished like a small room in a duke's castle, and afterwards the senorita sang a song or two, accompanying herself on the guitar. She had a voice that was as sweet as the trill of the nightingale, and they listened enraptured. They felt more like being in fairyland than on board a yacht.

But, charmed as they were, they were prudent in not staying late. The Hidalgo, though much softened in the presence of his daughter, and as charmed with her singing as her younger admirers, seemed to be weary.

So, having declared that they had spent the most delightful of evenings, they retired.

Anselmo was in attendance to escort them to their sleeping-cabin.

"It is near the Hidalgo's," he said, "and it is his pleasure that in the day you live with him as his own son would have done, had he lived."

"He had a son?" exclaimed Jim.

They were in the small cabin allotted to them by this time. It was almost as richly furnished as that of the Hidalgo. Anselmo shook his head mournfully.

"Yes," he said, "his excellency had a son until three years ago. He was eight years older than the senorita. So brave and tall and handsome."

"And he died?" said Morse.

"He was assassinated," replied Anselmo. "It was the old story of a woman and a jealous lover. There was a blow in the back with a knife as the hope of Toreomez was walking home in the dark, and the light was out. His excellency has been a changed man ever since."

"And the assassin?" said Jim, hotly. "They caught him?"

"Of what good?" asked Anselmo, with a shrug of the shoulders. "It was not the jealous lover, for at the very hour he was at a reception, and talking with the Hidalgo. How could one suspect him? And yet it was his work."

"I do not understand," said Jim.

"Senor," whispered Anselmo, "it was a hired knife that did the work. We all knew it, but nothing could be proved."

"But the actual assassins must have been known?"

"No, senor, for there are so many to be had for money. You see, senor," added Anselmo, simply, "it is not always easy to live in Spain, and one is often glad to earn an honest penny anyhow."

"By murder?"

"Well, senor, if one says no, another will say yes, so it's folly to refuse work when it comes to a man."

They saw it was useless to argue with him. He was a Spaniard to the backbone.

Though he undoubtedly deplored the death of his

young master, he looked at the act of assassination as part of a business with certain men of his race.

Nor need we at home be so much astonished that it should be so. In this country there are brutes of men who, for a price, will attack and maltreat, sometimes fatally injure, your enemy, if you are base enough to attack him by proxy.

Jim heard the story with a sense of uneasiness. Again vague presentiments were in his breast, dim shadows of events to come.

Anselmo was too well trained a servant to stay long, and he soon took a respectful leave of the "senors." On each side of the cabin there was a couch prepared, but Jim was not inclined as yet to sleep.

"I think of going on deck for a while," he said.

"I shall lie down," replied Morse, smiling; "perhaps I may not sleep. There is so much to think about."

Jim ascended to the deck, and found the captain and Miguel Navarrez conversing together.

The watch of the latter was just up, and the captain was about to take his place. It rarely happened that one or the other was not on duty.

The "Toreo" was a costly vessel to have charge of, and poor Barnett, knowing a second disaster would be fatal to his future, was ever anxious.

The moment Jim drew near, Miguel Navarrez ceased talking, and, bowing to the captain, retired.

As he passed Jim he honoured him with a light and careless salute.

The taciturn captain unbent a bit to Jim, and, speaking to him for the first time, expressed his pleasure in having some of his own country people on board.

"Yours is a strange story, youngster," he added; "at least, as much as I have heard of it strikes me as being out of the common."

Jim admitted it, laughingly. It was, he said, a story not usually heard or believed in, but was nevertheless true.

"Why not go home after it is finished, then?" asked the captain.

"The Hidalgo invited us to Seville," said Jim.

"Ah!"

It was the lightest of ejaculations, but it expressed a great deal.

"You do not think I have done wisely in accepting?" hinted Jim.

"It is time you went home," was the answer, "and I should have thought that you had had enough of Spaniards."

"The Hidalgo appears to be very kind."

"Oh, he is kind enough."

"But at the same time there is something peculiar about him."

"Is there?"

It was not exactly a query, but a sort of qualified assent to the remark that escaped the lips of the captain. Jim waited for him to say more, but he leant against the side of the vessel, and looked seaward in silence.

Not a word was said for a few minutes, and then Jim tried him again. He wanted to hear more from the captain, who probably knew a great deal about the Hidalgo.

"On the island we thought him very odd," Jim continued.

"He may be odd," said the captain; "we all are—more or less."

"The senorita is very charming," pursued Jim.

"As good as gold," said the captain, "but as I live aboard this yacht, I am not supposed to know anything about their home."

"You have never been there?"

"Never."

"Nor at Seville?"

"I keep out of the country altogether as much as I can. Now you mustn't ask me any more questions on that tack."

"Shall we see anything more of the 'Victor'?" was Jim's next query.

"Not unless an accident happens to our rigging," was the answer. "We can give her one knot out of four, and then forge ahead. We shall pass through the Straits half a day before her."

"Where are we going to?"

"Cadiz, my lad, Cadiz. And now, as I've been wheedled into jawing more than I have done for a month, I'll give my tongue a short rest."

Taking the hint, Jim asked no more questions, but contented himself for half an hour in surveying the sea and stars, and listening to the soft talking of the men of the watch.

The latter was all of the beauty of their country, of its sun, and its vines, and the village song and dance.

And he gathered from what they said that on reaching Cadiz the "Toreo" would be put into dock for cleaning, and the crew have a long leave ashore.

Hence their talk of village homes, and the festivities they hoped to indulge in there.

At last, feeling drowsy, Jim descended to the cabin, where he found Morse asleep, and tumbling in he soon kept him company.

The next day the wind remained fair up to noon, when it dropped, and for three hours there was a calm.

During the daylight the Hidalgo lived on deck, and over the after-part of the "Toreo" a silken awning was spread, under which he and Ximena and the two guests passed the hours away.

It was a most delightful, never-to-be-forgotten experience to the two friends. The Hidalgo was all courtesy, Ximena all sweetness, and at intervals she gave them a song with her masterly accompaniments on the guitar.

Captain Barnett rarely came under the awning, although he was always treated with marked kindness, but in his silent way sat outside listening to the music and the talking, with a face that was, like the Hidalgo's, expressive of mingled joy and sadness. Indeed, Jim had noticed that the two men, although physically contrasts, had much of a spirit in common.

Miguel, when on deck, made himself at home, and joined the party for a time. To Ximena he was very attentive, but was not so deeply appreciated as he would have liked to be.

The senorita was plainly bored by him, and scarce took pains to conceal it. Jim came in for most of her smiles, but Morse was not forgotten.

True to his word, the young chemist studiously avoided talking "shop" with the Hidalgo. Explosives were tabooed, and the Hidalgo seemingly had forgotten all his experiments on the island.

He did once make reference to his having very dangerous materials on board, and hoped the heat of the day would not affect them; but as Ximena promptly checked all converse on such a matter by striking up a lively air on her guitar, no further reference was made to it.

Eventually the first officer retired with a smile upon his face but bitterness in his heart. As he passed Jim there flashed from his eyes, as a spark from an anvil, a look of hate which the object of it failed to observe.

But Morse saw it, and for the first time his mind was set moving in calculating probabilities that were outside the world of chemicals.

He was startled and pained to note how intimate Jim had become with Ximena. Although he had never attached much importance to the love of Jim—a boy's love—for Eveline, it did not seem right that he should on the least provocation palpably forget her.

Suddenly Morse arrived at another conclusion.

"I see," he murmured. "I like her myself, and am foolishly getting jealous. Jim is merely doing the polite, in which I so miserably fail."

He was rarely wrong in estimating his own weaknesses, and he was right now. The charming Ximena had made an impression upon his hitherto adamant heart. He was pleased with her as he would have been with anything that was beautiful and rare.

There was an aching in his breast as he turned away and looked upon the shimmering sea.

"She must think I am a perfect clown," he muttered, "if she thinks of me at all. Bother it! I wish I had allowed Jim to come alone."

CHAPTER CCCVI.

HOMEWARD BY THE "GUADALQUIVIR."



THREE days after leaving Fermentera, the "Toreo" passed through the Straits of Gibraltar.

She was evidently known there, for on the shore of the little town there was quite a crowd watching her spin along before a smart breeze, and salutes were exchanged between her and several English yachts that were sailing to and fro with gay companies on board.

Not once since sailing away had the "Victor" been sighted again. The vessel seemed to have been left as far behind as the island and the life that had been spent thereon.

Past Gibraltar, round into the Atlantic, and upward to Cadiz sped the "Toreo," arriving without a hitch in anything on board in the evening of the fourth day.

They slept in their cabins that night, and on the morrow the Hidalgo and his party, composed of daughter, guests, and the attendants who were with him on the island, started on mules for Barromed, at the mouth of the Guadalquivir river.

It was a coast ride of twenty miles or so, and it was accomplished, with a long noonday halt, in the day. All of them, with their baggage, were transported without any fuss.

A big barge that could be sailed or propelled by the oar was awaiting them, and they embarked on a journey up the finest of Spanish rivers.

All meals were partaken of ashore, and the halts were of necessity frequent. At night the tents were pitched, and the spot chosen was always distinguished for its picturesque beauty.

One would love to linger on such a time of absolute peaceful enjoyment. There was not even Miguel Navarez to mar it. As for Morse, he was mostly the companion of the Hidalgo, while Jim paid court to Ximena.

They passed scattered villages, and sighted an occasional small town by the way, but halted at none of those places.

There was a sluggish repose on the whole country that was in marked contrast to anything the young voyagers had ever experienced in an inhabited place.

The women seemed to do all the work, while the men lay about and smoked or slept in the sunlight or shade, according to fancy.

"The curse of my country," remarked the Hidalgo, "is slothfulness."

And of that his hearers entertained little doubt. Sunny Spain is idle Spain, especially down south. To live and do nothing appears to be the highest ambition of its man kind.

Fruit and flowers and sunshine everywhere. A paradise!—a vision of beauty! It charmed the eye, and lulled the mind to repose.

Proceeding leisurely, two days were occupied in ascending the river to Seville. There is a railway from Cadiz to it, but the Hidalgo would have none of it. The iron rails and the snorting metal horse clashed with his early training and after-views of life.

It was not a solitary journey by any means, for they passed all sorts of craft, and some steamboats of considerable size with passengers and tourists on board.

At last the ancient city was sighted, its enormous towers, built by the Moors, first coming into view.

Among them is the wonderful Giralda, three hundred and fifty feet high.

It was a picture of great beauty, which not even some modern buildings, erected in the spirit of the times, could mar. Exultingly the Hidalgo stood in the prow of the barge, and with extended arms hailed it as "home."

"Beloved Seville," he cried, in an ecstatic soliloquy, "once the capital of Spain, and then the capital of the world! Home of the mighty Moor, taken from them by our own Ferdinand the Third, ravaged by the accursed Soult under Napoleon; but still living and beautiful, I greet thee!"

Ximena crept up to him and touched his arm.

"Our guests are not accustomed to such a show of feeling. They are astonished," she whispered.

"Woe to them," replied the Hidalgo, "when they sight their place of birth after an absence, without the blood surging in their veins! It is enough, my child. I have eased my bursting heart, and am myself again."

He sat down, and, with his head resting on his hand, continued to survey his beloved home, but spoke no more until the barge glided up to a landing-stage without the city wall.

Seville stands on the left bank of the Guadalquivir, and on the eastern bank, where the waters of the famous river laved its mighty walls, stood the castle of the Hidalgo.

To give a full description of that wonderful place just now would probably bore the reader ere it was finished. Anyway, it would take up too much of our time and space. Let us then briefly dwell upon it.

Originally it was the work of the Moors, who erected it some time in the tenth century, and added to it during the three succeeding centuries of their occupation of Spain.

On their being driven out in the thirteenth century, it passed from the Moors into the hands of the founder

of the Toreomez family, who was a follower of the all-conquering Ferdinand III.

From thence to the present day it has been held by the successors of the first Toreomez.

Additions were made to the castle. It was strengthened until it became a fortress, and up to the middle of the eighteenth century was kept sound, and in those days was practically impregnable. But Soult in 1810 partially destroyed it, as he did many other mighty residences in Seville, and since then the Toreomez family have been content to live with it partly in ruins.

But sufficient of it was left for the residence of an ordinary monarch with his retainers.

There was, therefore, accommodation enough, and more than enough, for the comparatively modest household of the Hidalgo Gonsalvo Toreomez.

The barge that bore our friends stopped, as we have stated, by a landing-stage, on which a number of the home retainers assembled to welcome their lord and master.

Like the men who had followed the Hidalgo to the island, their attire was of the olden days, and to Jim and Morse the scene was like a portion of some historical play. The men stood in two lines, through which they passed, bowing with the ease and grace of well-trained dependants.

The Hidalgo led the way, with Morse by his side, and Jim came next with Ximena. Many a dark eye flashed upon the last named as they went by, and meaning glances were exchanged; for it is the way of the Spaniard to jump quickly at conclusions in matters appertaining to the affections.

It must be remembered that Jim, being tall and strongly built, looked much older than he really was. Most people would have taken him to be eighteen, or even older, and he had a naturally bold, confident way of carrying himself that was sure to be associated with approaching manhood.

They passed under an arch, broad and high, and stood within a courtyard fully a hundred feet square.

On every side arose walls, pierced with narrow windows, with battlements eighty feet overhead, and huge towers rising above all.

Across the courtyard, through a doorway, and then into a hall so vast in its proportions that it might have served for a church, they went, and ere Jim could take a glance at the old armour and many ancient embellishments of the place, his hand was grasped by the Hidalgo, with words of welcome to "his home."

"Mine—and yours," said the grave old nobleman, "so long as you care to stay."

It was a Spanish welcome, with more genuine feeling than there generally is in Spanish courtesies. Jim murmured his thanks, and glanced at Ximena, who smiled her welcome with lips and eyes.

Alas for Eveline! she was at that moment entirely forgotten.

It was afternoon, and long shafts of sunlight came through the narrow windows, lighting up the hall and beautifying the armour and other objects on which they fell.

But there was no time to fully admire anything, for the Hidalgo summoned an aged attendant, to whom he spoke a few words, and then, turning to his guests, said:

"You will do well to rest for a few hours. The dinner-hour is seven."

He bowed; Ximena smiled. They bowed in return, and then the Hidalgo and his daughter vanished.

"If the senors are prepared," murmured the attendant, "it will be to my honour to escort them to their chambers."

They were ready, and followed him from the hall, through a long passage, and up a broad stone staircase with a carved balustrade that was a dream of sculptured beauty.

Rays of intense light streamed through the windows and deep shadows everywhere. Overhead they saw that the ceiling was of the most marvellous tracery of white and gold, one of the records of their occupation left by the Moors.

On the summit of the staircase they came to another passage, the flooring of which was hidden by Persian rugs, and on the left side were the chambers apporportioned to the guests.

"It is his excellency's suggestion," said the attendant, "that you have chambers that communicate."

They understood and appreciated the kindly feeling that prompted the suggestion. As friends, they would like to be within hail of each other.

And in such a vast place it was desirable.

Their rooms were dwarfed by the dimensions of the hall, but still of exceptional size, and in each there was a huge bed that would have afforded sleeping-room for half a dozen, if need were.

All the furniture and fittings were very old, solemn, and stately, and to each room there was but one narrow window with panes of coloured glass, through which the sun shone, casting prism-like colours on the floor.

"The senors will find the cold bath ready," said the attendant; "if they desire warm water, it can be brought."

But warm water would have been ridiculous on a day when the heat was almost tropical, and was, of course, not accepted.

On the left side of the first room was the door of the second chamber, which was a duplicate of the first, and satisfied that the wants of the two guests were fully supplied, the attendant departed.

Jim and Morse sat down in two huge old oaken chairs, and silently gazed about them for a few moments. At last Jim found his tongue.

"I suppose," he said, "that it is all real?"

"It is real enough," calmly answered Morse.

"You take things more coolly than I do."

"My mind has not been disturbed by communion with such a charming girl as the senorita."

Jim flushed slightly and bit his under lip.

"Don't be sarcastic," he said. "After all, what does it amount to? A little pleasant companionship for the time. Ximena is merely courteous."

"Let us look at the bath," said Morse, rising.

It stood in a corner of the chamber, a fixture, and was made of marble. About three feet depth of cool water had a very inviting look.

"Which room will you have, Jim?" asked Morse.

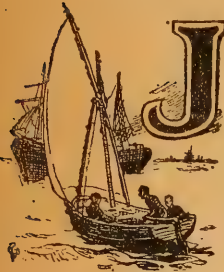
"Which you please. It doesn't matter."

Jim spoke rather shortly. There was something peculiar in the manner of Morse, and he did not quite like it.

"I will take the next," said Morse, and walked away.

CHAPTER CCCVII.

THE FIRST NIGHT IN THE CASTLE.



JIM threw off his clothes and plunged into the cold water. It acted upon him like a powerful tonic, and after a good deal of splashing about, he jumped out and gave himself a rub-down with the Turkish towels.

Then he was himself again.

The door of Morse's room stood open, and he called out:

"How do you feel now?"

"Ever so much better," was the reply.

"Quite yourself again?"

"Yes."

"That's all right."

A few minutes afterwards, Jim, having dressed, walked into Morse's room, and found him sitting in a low easy-chair. There was another hard by, and Jim took it.

"Look here, old fellow," he said, "you and I are not going to have anything off the mark about anybody?"

"I should think not," answered Morse, earnestly.

"As for Ximena," continued Jim, "I mean to be merely polite to her in the future——"

"You will be just as you have been, and don't make a donkey of yourself."

And then they both laughed heartily. Presently Jim turned the subject to the Hidalgo.

"It is strange," he said, "that he has never once mentioned the curious notion he entertained on the island about that explosive he swallowed."

"What do you make of that, Jim?"

"Of course, he came to the same conclusion that you did—the conclusion that it was harmless."

"I do not think he did that, Jim. By-and-by, when I have made sure of something, I will tell you why he does not speak of it. But it is too serious a thing until I am quite sure, so I would rather not mention it just yet."

"Just as you like, old fellow," said Jim, lying back in his chair and yawning. "How do you feel with regard to forty winks now?"

"Just as if I could do them, and one over. The coolness and the semi-gloom of this dear old place invite me to repose."

In a few moments both were off, and they dozed the time away until they were aroused by the return of the attendant.

"If the senors please," he said, "it is within an hour of dinner-time."

They aroused themselves, and whatever little sleep was left in them was dispelled by a communication he had to make.

"It is his excellency's suggestion"—he seemed to be very fond of that word—"that the senors attire themselves in some garments he has provided for them."

There was one suit on the bed and another in the adjoining room, of attire similar to that worn by the Hidalgo, but of brighter materials more suitable to youth.

There were the doublet and long silk hose, ruffled lace collar and cuffs, shoes of velvet, and a jewelled dagger to wear in a sash if they chose to.

The recipients of this peculiar form of attention stared at each other.

"His excellency loves harmony in the appearance of all within the castle," murmured the attendant.

"Well, if it is his wish," said Jim, "I really see nothing to object to. Indeed, I think it is a very courteous act."

The man offered to stay and assist them to dress, but the offer was declined, and once more our friends were left to themselves.

"Our clothes," said Jim, "are rather the worse for wear."

"It isn't that," returned Morse. "You heard what the servant said about harmony."

"Anyway, we can see how we look toggled up," said Jim, laughing.

When they had dressed themselves, two more picturesque youngsters never surveyed each other critically and, it may be added, approvingly.

"Jim, you never looked so well in your life before."

"Morse, you are a perfect lady-killer. I must now say farewell to Ximena."

But though he laughed heartily, the smile of Morse was of the feeblest.

It was not long ere they were summoned to the hall for the evening meal. There they found the Hidalgo and Ximena awaiting them. No other guests were present, but all the Spanish servants—the board being already spread—sat at the lower end of the table.

Those who waited were few and all strangers to Jim, being of negro origin.

And this discovery recalled to Jim the fact that Romeo had accompanied him to the castle.

He had entirely, for a time, forgotten him.

When they went on board the barge, Romeo took a place among the retainers of the Hidalgo, and from that time nothing had been seen of him.

Nor was he among those waiting at table.

What, then, had become of him?

But it was not possible to ask questions about him then, for the Hidalgo, having pledged them in a cup of wine, suddenly entered on the old theme of explosives.

Then the face of Ximena darkened, and she strove to turn the conversation into another channel. Failing in that, she talked to Jim, and left Morse to deal with her father.

It did not seem kind, especially as he had practically been pledged not to discuss the subject, but the grave old host persistently addressed himself to him. He had no resource but to occasionally make a polite rejoinder.

The food and wines were of the best, but of the latter the guests, as was their habit, partook but sparingly. The Hidalgo was also to be numbered among the moderate consumers of wine.

Not so the dependants. There being no restriction upon them, some drank rather freely, and from subdued talk they gradually rose to lively debate on various matters of interest.

The most prominent subject was that of the coming bull-fight in Seville, and the prospect of seeing a matador who had suddenly become famous.

The arguments on his merits took the usual form, that of a contradictory nature.

High words were cropping up, apparently unheeded by the Hidalgo, who continued to chat with Morse, and eventually asked him to pay a visit to his laboratory after dinner.

Morse could not refuse, and he accepted the invitation with his eyes averted from Ximena, who at that moment was regarding him steadily with a look of reproach.

The moment he had accepted she renewed her conversation with Jim.

Presently, just as a row was imminent between two

of the men discussing the bull-fighter's qualifications, a gong sounded, and in an instant among those at the table, there was the silence of a church assembly awaiting the coming of the priests.

The Hidalgo slowly rose from his seat, stood with clasped hands and bent head for a moment, and then left his seat.

Ximena was quickly by his side, with her hand upon his arm.

"I am going to sing," she said. "You will come and hear me?"

"In a little while, my child," he said, hurriedly. "Senor Morse and myself have a question of much importance to settle. I am going to my laboratory."

"If you are long," said Ximena, with assumed playfulness, "I must come to fetch you away."

Turning to Jim, she motioned to him to give her his arm, and, to his surprise, he saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

"You will not object to my singing?" she said.

"No, indeed," he answered, warmly and honestly.

The Hidalgo took Morse away to the right, and Ximena went to the left and guided Jim to a small room, with two windows opening on the courtyard.

Such a piece of ornamental work as was exhibited on the walls Jim had never yet seen. It was the finest relic, Ximena told him, of the Moorish occupation within the castle.

"They have nothing like it even in Granada," she said.

Her guitar lay on a lounge, and picking it up, she touched the strings, and in a low, sweetly-sad voice sang the following, which she named, "The Gipsies' Song."

"Liberty, liberty!

Search the world round;

'Tis with the gipsy

Alone it is found.

There in the greenwood

We worship thee now—

The free—oh, the free!—

Still live under the bough.

"Trarah! Trarah!

Hark! the deep dingles ring;

Free hearts with the birds

And the bee are on wing.

Joy lives in the greenwood,

The gipsies, I vow,

Are blithe—oh, so blithe!—

When under the bough."

Her voice ceased, and she sat with her hands resting on the strings of the guitar, and her eyes fixed on vacancy.

"Would you really care for the life of a gipsy?" asked Jim, after a silence.

"It would be better than mine," she answered.

"What! You with all that one on earth could desire, exchange it all for their ragged lives?"

"They are happy," she said, simply, and she tossed

the guitar to the other end of the lounge, as if she had done with it for ever.

Jim was more and more puzzled. But after some reflection he accounted for her sadness by the grief she must still feel for the loss of her only brother.

It was, however, a subject he did not think it was wise to enter upon, and remained silent until she spoke.

"It is time they came from the laboratory," she said. "Let us go for them."

Jim had to obey her wish, and together they left the room, crossed the hall, deserted now, and passed down a passage to a door at the further end.

Ximena opened it, and they stood upon the threshold looking in.

The Hidalgo was standing by a crucible, speaking in tones of great earnestness to Morse.

"It is one of Lablanque's choicest recipes," he said. "It excels in power all others."

"I do not believe in Lablanque," replied Morse; "the man is a fraud."

The Hidalgo stopped short and stared at him as if he had libelled one very near and dear to him.

For a moment it seemed as if he would strike the daring youth.

But then came the thought that it was his guest who had thus transgressed, and a bitter smile passed over the wan face of the old Spaniard.

"Lablanque a fraud?" was all he said.

"Yes," insisted Morse. He was standing with his back to the door, and did not know that anyone was there. The Hidalgo was also oblivious of their presence. "An impostor. He imposed upon you for money."

The Hidalgo clutched a table that was near him, and his breath came short and hard from his lips. It was with difficulty that he restrained himself.

"Pardon me," continued Morse, "if I am bold enough to speak the truth, but I do it for your sake. The man, I say, is a fraud. As you have told me, you have paid him as much as two thousand pounds, English money—not much to you, I ought to say, but perhaps quite a little fortune to him."

"Go on," said the Hidalgo, in a tone of voice that was like the ring of steel upon steel.

"What did he give you in return?" asked Morse—"a magnesium lamp that could be purchased for a few ducats, a case of fireworks, a number of instruments that produce nothing, do nothing, and a lot of bogus recipes."

Jim remembered the instruments that the Hidalgo had in his tent, and how they had puzzled Morse. They were on the table the Hidalgo held so hard in his grasp. He turned to the nearest.

"A few springs, and a wheel or two from some old clock," continued Morse. "Tell me what it will do?"

The Hidalgo passed a hand across his brow, but answered nothing.

"A trumpery thing," resumed Morse, as he laid his hand upon it; "a child's toy that does nothing but turn round. It ought to have the fixed old woman with the glued goose upon it, as they have in the Dutch toy of a farmhouse. You turn, and the old woman and the goose go round and round, but never get any nearer to each other. Neither will this bring you to any point where aught is to be learned."

Morse was in one of his resolute moods, and turning to the next instrument, said:

"This thing will not turn at all. It is merely a lot of odds and ends put together."

"It is for one of the recipes I have not yet attempted," said the Hidalgo, in a low tone.

"It is for nothing," insisted Morse; "fit for nothing. Now, as to this powder. You say that a severe shaking would explode it, and blow down Seville."

"It is on the word of Lablanque that I found my assertion," returned the Hidalgo.

Morse picked up a hammer and raised it above his head. The old Spaniard extended an arm imploringly.

"Beware what you do!" he cried.

It was too late to restrain Morse. The hammer fell with a force that sent some of the powder into the air in a small cloud, and a portion of it flying in every direction.

And that was all.

No explosion. Seville was spared a wrecking.

"So much for the rascal's chemistry!" said Morse, contemptuously, to the dumbfounded Hidalgo. "A lot of worthless rubbish. You were deceived—defrauded!"

"And for two whole years," said Gonsalvo Torómeze, "I have experimented and dreamt, and toiled and hoped, and waited for *this*!"

He sank into a chair, and covering his face with his hands, sat shivering.

"Go, leave me," he moaned.

Morse turned away, and saw Jim and Ximena at the door. The discovery startled him, but he kept his presence of mind. Gliding up to them, he whispered to Ximena:

"Go to him. He will be none the worse for this, rude awakening though it be."

She looked at him gratefully, as she softly walked into the room.

Morse gently pushed Jim out and closed the door.

"Come away," he said; "it will be better to leave them together for a time."

They returned to the hall, and there sat down. Jim put his elbows on the table, and rested his chin upon his hands.

"Tell me what all this means," he said.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.

The Island School.



With the fury of a tiger, Almantana sprang at Escardo, and both tumbled into the water and disappeared.

"My dear boy," replied Morse, "from the hour when the Hidalgo made that ridiculous *fiasco* of blowing up the pinnacle with a little squib-powder, I suspected something was wrong. Here is the matter in a nutshell. He was fond of chemistry in a minor way years ago. When he lost his son by the hand of an assassin, *his mind became unhinged*, and chemistry became his passion. In Paris he fell into the hands of a charlatan named Lablanque, who imposed upon his mental weakness, and swindled him. That is all."

"And the whorshot of your disillusionizing him, what will that be?"

"We must wait for that. Suppose we stroll into the courtyard?"

"In a moment. So this is what you wanted to verify?" said Jim.

"Precisely," answered Morse; "and when to-night he, in a confiding moment, offered to show me how the World Destroyer is compounded, and I saw the ridiculous mixture it was, my belief was confirmed."

"It may kill him—the shock of it."

"Or cure him—if the right mental turn should be taken. Now let us go."

Jim rose, and they went out together, and as an antidote to their strained emotions came upon Romeo attired in the garb of one of the Hidalgo's attendants, and strutting up and down like a peacock.

He was alone, and did not perceive the two friends at first, for the evening light was getting dim.

Romeo burst into a soliloquy.

"Spec it 'bout take all de stuffin' out ob dat grandfader ob mine if he see me now," he said aloud; "mose people dat was on de island be considerabel taken 'back. Takin' dis suit ob clothes all roun', de most partial pusson in de worle boun' for to admit dat it am a scorcher."

Unable to listen in silence any longer, Jim and Morse burst into a roar of laughter. Romeo wheeled round, bent on attacking the scoffing person, but on seeing who it was, a broad grin spread itself all over his ample face.

CHAPTER CCCVIII.

ROMEO IN CLOVER.—THE EFFECT OF MORSE'S REVELATION.



DAT you, genelman?" he said.

"It is Romeo!" cried Jim, as if he had a doubt on the subject removed by indisputable evidence.

"You not know me!" exclaimed the delighted Romeo; "how is dat now?"

"Why, you look more like a Hidalgo than anything else," replied Morse.

"Him and me 'bout de same figger," asserted Romeo, complacently.

"It was more the air than the figure we went by," remarked Jim.

"De clothes put de air on a man," said Romeo, more and more delighted. "You neber see me in *full dress* afore—did you, now?"

"Never."

"It a long time since me get a bess suit quite up to dis. It do set off my figger."

"Are you enrolled in the list of retainers?" asked Jim.

"Me!" cried Romeo, overcome with astonishment; "not a bit ob it. Me a guess—a kitchen guess—nuffin' to do, and all me like to eat, which am 'siderable in dis fine air. Dey don't let me do nuffin' but sit and eat and drink all de day long. Marse Morse and Marse Jim, it am bess to tell de trufe, am it not?"

"Certainly."

"Den me boun' to confess dey dis day make me sich a dinner dat me obliged to come out here and walk slowly so dat it *settle down*!"

As he made this admission, Romeo grinned all over his face. Lowering his voice, after glancing round to see if anyone were listening, he added in a whisper:

"For all dat, me refer de island and de open air. Moreober, though dis 'ere castle be a berry fine place, it hab too much ob de ghose look 'bout it. Furdere-more, de people here say dat him exlency am——"

Romeo finished by touching his forehead significantly.

"So that is what they say?" said Morse.

"Dat so," rejoined Romeo; "and what am more, he am be imposed on."

As he made this announcement, Romeo laid his finger on the arm of Jim, as if imploring him to be careful and not betray the secret he was about to entrust to him.

"*Dey robbing de Hidalgo*," he said, hoarsely, "and dat Anselmo chap he trus' wif eberyt'ing, de wors' ob all."

"Robbing him of what?" inquired Morse.

"Ob *somethin'* dey take out ob de cellars below. Me hear dem talking 'bout it. Dey been at work while de Hidalgo 'way, 'cordin' to de 'structions ob dat Anselmo, and now dey goin' to mobe it all away in a boat to-morrer night."

"But what is it?" asked Jim. "What are they taking?"

"It am in boxes, for sure," said Romeo. "Me hear him say so—dat Anselmo."

"And where are these boxes?"

"Dat not known to me for certain," said Romeo. "Not havin' an opportunity to fine out."

"Find it out if you can," said Jim; "but be careful. These Spaniards are very handy with the knife."

"You trus' me to look after numby one," said Romeo.

Some of the servants of the Hidalgo now appeared in the courtyard, and Jim and Morse returned to the hall.

It was still deserted, and they sat down in their original seats.

"This is a matter that wants looking into," said Morse. "Unless Romeo has made an egregious mistake, a big robbery is about to be perpetrated."

"But surely," said Jim, "the Hidalgo would never keep his money in the vaults of the castle. He *must* be modern enough to trust a banker."

"Can't say, in his state of mind," rejoined Morse. "Hush! I hear a footstep."

He must have had very good ears, for the footstep was too light for Jim to hear it. It was that of Ximena, who entered the hall, and on espying them, came over to the table. As they rose to greet her, she motioned them to keep their seats, and sat down by Jim.

"The Hidalgo," she said, "has received a great shock. You have undeceived him, Senor Morse, and he had such faith in that Lablanque."

"It was not because he was merely deceived in the rascal that I spoke to his excellency," replied Morse; "but I could see that the constant and inevitable failures in his experiments were worrying him. He was so ready to charge them to his own errors, rather than to the fact that he had been imposed upon."

"He never thought of that," said Ximena, "such was his faith. He knows now that you are right. It was a terrible blow, and he has been violently agitated. But he is sleeping."

"If I have done wrong——" began Morse, but was interrupted by a motion of the hand from Ximena.

"I would not have it undone for a world of wealth," she said. "We will know the full result when he awakes. He will then be better or worse."

No previous reference to the mental condition of the Hidalgo had been made by her, and they passed it over in silence.

"I intend to watch and wait until he awakes," said Ximena a minute later. "Will it be too much to ask you to stay with me?"

It was an appeal to both, and their answer in a glad affirmative was simultaneous.

"It may be for long," she hinted—"for the night through."

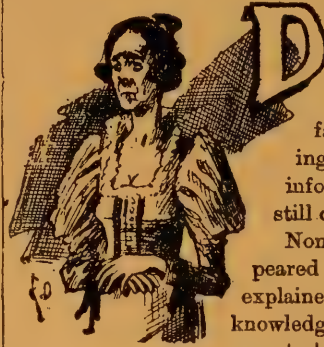
"As long as you will permit us to remain we will be with you," said Jim.

"I am accustomed to being awake and working the night through," said Morse, quietly. "It will be no tax upon me."

So the three young people prepared themselves to watch, if need be, through the night.

CHAPTER CCXIX.

MORSE THE BENEFACTOR.—ANOTHER HIDALGO.



DURING the next two hours Ximena went away at intervals to visit her father, always returning with the encouraging information that he was still calmly sleeping.

None of the retainers appeared in the hall, which, she explained, arose from their knowledge that the Hidalgo had gone to his laboratory.

"It is their custom," she said, quietly, "to keep to their quarters when they hear he is shut up there. They know that it means a nightlong absence of the master of the castle. As for me, I am but a child, and they leave me to myself."

"They ought to be reported for their neglect," said Jim, indignantly.

"Why should I add to his troubles?" asked Ximena. "No. Their neglect suited me. I have spent many nights alone with my guitar."

And she might have added, "with my tears."

Midnight arrived, and the only sounds they heard in the castle were voices that occasionally rose high, as the retainers quarrelled among themselves. Beyond that hour all was still.

"Come with me," said Ximena, after one of her visits to the sleeping Hidalgo, "and look upon Seville in the moonlight."

She opened a small door which they had not hitherto observed, and ascending a narrow staircase, they reached the battlements, from whence they looked upon the old city.

The tinkling of a guitar, as some fervent lover sang to his lady love some serenade, was the only sound they heard. The streets were deserted. There was not even a night watchman to be seen.

How beautiful, how majestic was the scene!

Spread out before them were the old houses, interspersed with churches and mighty towers, and towering above all was the Giralda tower of the cathedral, with its bronze female figure fourteen feet high on the summit, so constructed and so marvellously balanced that it acts as a weathercock, and moves with the slightest puff of wind.

"Beautiful Seville!" involuntarily burst from the lips of Morse. It was a thought that formed itself into words ere he knew it.

"It is better than its people," said Ximena, with a

tinge of bitterness in her voice. "They are very cruel, My murdered brother lies there."

She pointed towards one of the churches with a graveyard, and its tombs dotted about it adjoining.

"We know his sad story," murmured Morse.

"If I were a man," said Ximena, "I would never rest until I had discovered his assassin."

They lingered for a time, and then returned to the hall, deeply impressed by what they had seen. It seemed to Jim as if he had suddenly been carried back to live in a dreamy and romantic past.

They talked little now, and shortly Ximena again left them. In a few minutes she was back, and stood by the doorway beckoning to them.

"The Hidalgo is awake, and would see you."

The old Spaniard was still in his laboratory, lying upon a camp-bedstead.

The moment they saw him they became aware that a great change had been wrought in him.

He was a different man, insomuch that his face had lost much of its sadness, and the eyes more than all showed the effect of Morse's fearless exposure of the French swindler.

There was a smile of welcome on his lips.

"I must ask your pardon for not rising," he said; "but I am as one weary with a long journey. I am not sick, but well, if weak. Sit here."

He addressed Morse, who took a chair that was by his bedside. Jim and Ximena drew up behind it.

"I recall but feebly," said the Hidalgo, "what you told me a few hours ago, but I know that the foolish dream of a life has been broken, and it is better so. Lying here as I have done, almost alone, how was I to know that a man of birth and breeding, as Lablanque undoubtedly is, could be such a liar and scoundrel?"

"Forget him," advised Morse.

"I will," said the Hidalgo, resolutely, "and all the folly I have been guilty of through his impostures. My young friends, you are in need of rest. Retire. To-morrow we will confer together on more pleasant matters."

He gave a hand to each, and as Ximena showed that she proposed to stay with the Hidalgo, they took leave of her also, and left them together.

Morse was delighted with the success that had followed his exposure of the Frenchman. More, and that of a most desirable nature, had come out of it than he expected.

"The Hidalgo," he said, as he sat in a chair, while Jim leisurely removed his clothing, "will soon be his old self, the self we have not seen before. His case is a very wonderful one. He has been insane without a doubt; but, in opposition to all that I have ever heard, he retains the memory of what he has done and thought during his time of madness. But there is one thing we have now to consider, Jim."

"What is that?" sleepily asked Jim. He did not feel much inclined for further discussion just then.

"Have you forgotten what Romeo told us?"

"No; not entirely. But I was not thinking of it at the moment."

"What can we do in the matter?"

"Let the Hidalgo know."

"That won't do. He is not in a fit condition yet to bear any further excitement."

"It would not do to speak to Ximena?"

"She is too young. Besides, there is the question of her being able to suggest anything that will be helpful. We must do what has to be done, alone."

"Will to-morrow be time enough to arrange our plans?"

"I think so, Jim. Indeed, neither of us is in a mental condition, thanks to sitting up so late, to lay out our plans. Therefore I will leave you to the repose we both need so much. Good-night, old fellow."

Jim answered with the lightest of snores. Having got into bed, he went to sleep instantly, and Morse walked away softly to his own room, thinking as he went.

CHAPTER CCCX.

THE VICTOR ON HER WAY.—MACBETH SHOWS WHAT HE IS MADE OF.



THE next day there was some fun, arising from renewed hostilities between Macbeth and the agent's cook.

They met friendly enough in the morning, and Macbeth was keenly interested in a dish his rival *chef* was preparing—it was something in the way of a stew, and the dispute arose about the ingredients.

"It only want 'bout a handful ob onions to make it puffed," said Macbeth.

"A single onion would ruin it," asserted the cook.

They argued the question hotly, and Macbeth walked away with his blood boiling. A stew without an onion in it was to him a weak and tasteless thing.

The cook went away from the boiler suspended over his cuddy-fire, and was absent about five minutes. Returning, he caught a glimpse of Macbeth hastening away from the fire, but suspected no ill.

It was not until the stew was turned out that the cook discovered onions had been surreptitiously introduced into it.

Not a single onion, or a mere handful, but sufficient to make it practically an onion stew, with a few other ingredients in it.

The wrath of that cook was overpowering. He was a man who could not be trifled with at any time, and an outrage like this was enough to drive him mad.

Nor was it any consolation to him to find that everybody on board seemed to enjoy the stew, and made no comment on the preponderance of onions. It only added fuel to the fire.

Macbeth, having performed the felonious act, had vanished.

Hamlet was available, but the perpetrator could not be punished by proxy, and he seemed so unconscious of anything wrong, that the *chef* could not have justified an assault upon him.

Still murder lurked in his heart, and his morning work being done, he went prowling round in search of the culprit, extending the area of his seeking until he had examined all the parts of the ship open to him.

Exhausted with his labours, he sat down upon the floor of the cuddy, and the warm sunrays acting upon his exhausted body he fell asleep.

He was a man of full habit, and he slept long and soundly. The afternoon had arrived when he opened his eyes and looked about him in astonishment.

He carried a watch, as all good cooks are bound to do, especially when they travel, to time their work. Referring to it, he found that the time was close on three o'clock.

A shudder ran through his portly body as he reflected on the enormity of the neglect he had been guilty of. His mid-day duties must have been undertaken by somebody else. But who could fill his post?

His underlings were scarcely capable of doing it, and he would have the fact of his great omission recorded against him by the agent, who would in due course report it to the company under which he served.

He might account for it by asserting that he had been taken ill, but even that could hardly be accepted as a sufficient excuse for his neglect of duty.

Rising to his feet, he walked wearily out, and found evidence that everybody had been cared for, and by no less a person than Macbeth, who had returned from his undiscovered retreat and usurped his place.

Assisted by his descendant, the aged nigger was just finishing the washing up. Macbeth ignored the cook as he strode up with a gloomy countenance. His underlings were idling about, watching the three negroes at work with countenances expressive of amusement.

There was nobody else around; all the tourists and boys were enjoying themselves in various ways.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the cook, wrathfully.

Macbeth vouchsafed him no response. One of the underlings said that as his chief had been sleeping, Macbeth took the midday dinner work upon himself.

"Dat not de trufe," said Macbeth. "Me am 'pointed to de post ob cook as long as me like to keep it."

"Who appointed you?" asked the cook.

Macbeth, with a disdainful lifting of his nose, declined to answer.

"Leave those plates alone!" bellowed the cook "and you fellows finish the job."

One of the men cautiously advanced to obey the command, and Macbeth promptly hit him over the head with a dish, breaking it into a dozen pieces.

"I'm responsible for the crockery," roared the cook, "and that spoils the set. I'll murder you, you Nubian-blackening brute!"

To show that he meant business, he began to roll up the cuffs of his coat, with the notion that Macbeth would be terrified and clear out.

But he reckoned without his nigger.

Macbeth, nothing loth, also made preparations to settle the matter by combat.

"You boys see fair," he said, addressing his son and grandson, "and one of you fellows," to the cook's assistants, "get sumfin' to carry away de corpses ob dis low pusson."

To all but the principals the prospect of a fight afforded ineffable delight. The cook was a bit of a bully to his subordinates, and whether he came out victorious or defeated, the bare idea of his being reduced to fighting a nigger was a matter of hearty congratulation to them all.

"You will see there is no undue interference in this common business," said the cook, loftily, to his men, "but when I have done with this black reptile, *bury him*."

Then he put himself into an attitude, based on the soundest pugilistic scientific principles, and called upon Macbeth to "come on."

The response was immediate and startling in its results.

Macbeth, swinging his arms like the sails of a wind-mill, rushed upon him, and the cook stood on the defensive, arms squared and fists well raised, so as to cover the ribs and face.

The nigger aimed no blows at either, but, when well within reach, ducked his head and drove it into the pit of the cook's portly stomach with the force of a battering-ram.

The unhappy man went down as if a railway engine had collided with him, and lay upon the floor gasping for dear life.

An ordinary man would have dislocated his neck, but Macbeth came out of it without so much as ruffling his white wool.

He straightened himself up and regarded his defeated enemy with a look that, in regard to dignity and disdain, left nothing to be desired.

"Dat little job over," he said, "me retire from de

pose ob head cook, to which I 'point myself when he not turn up. You fellers berrer finish de washing-up. Hamlet, let us leab de presents of dis low compary."

He strode away, followed by his descendants, and the grinning subordinates of the cook went to his assistance.

They rubbed him, and stretched him out, and worked his arms like pump-handles until he was restored to a condition that enabled him to gather breath again and speak.

"The brute!" he muttered; "does he call that fighting? And you worms allowed him to do it."

"You told us not to interfere, sir," said one of the men, deferentially.

"Finish that work," said the cook. "Where is the agent?"

"He's been with the captain all day, sir."

"Is he aware of my being absent—from indisposition?"

"Not that I am aware of, sir. When it was found that you were not here that nigger took the lead. We objected, but the boys said he was good enough cook for them as anyone else, and we allowed him to do as he pleased."

"It is well," said the cook, in a melodramatic way. "For once I will allow his usurping my post to pass, but the next time he does it, I will annihilate him."

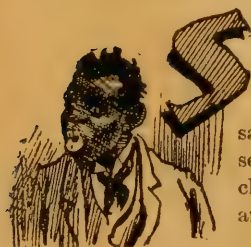
But Macbeth, it may be said, saved his precious body from annihilation by leaving the cook from thenceforth severely alone.

The victory over his rival was too complete to be marred by a sequel.

Thus with these and other kindred changes of events the "Victor" pursued her way, without herself meeting with any great disaster, eventually landing passengers and cargo in the old home country.

CHAPTER CCCXI.

THE CASH-BOXES OF THE HIDALGO.



ENOR, a cup of chocolate."

Jim opened his eyes and saw the aged retainer by his bedside with a salver in his hand. On it were several things—a cup of chocolate, light refreshment, and a small flagon of wine.

"The Senorita Ximena has breakfasted," said the attendant, "and suggests that you should partake of something before rising."

"I thank her," said Jim, as he sat up and took the cup from the salver. "What is the time?"

"Close upon noon, senor."

"So late? We have slept soundly, and too long."

"The Senor Morse was up before eight," said the attendant, quietly. "He breakfasted with the senorita."

"Very kind of him to let me have my sleep out," muttered Jim.

He quickly disposed of the refreshment brought him, the wine excepted, and declining the proffered assistance to help him dress, the dismissed attendant glided from the room.

"Morse seems to be trying to cut me out," thought Jim, and then he tried to laugh, but it was a failure; for, as if to reproach him, the image of Eveline rose up before his eyes.

"It is all boy-and-girl nonsense," he muttered.

Twenty minutes afterwards he entered the hall, and found Morse and Ximena there. One of his first inquiries was for the Hidalgo, and he received a very favourable reply.

"All he needs now," said Ximena, "is rest."

"By the way, senorita," said Morse, "we are expecting a remittance at the chief banker's of the city. What is the address? Probably it is the bank of the Hidalgo."

"His excellency," said Ximena, "does not bank now—at least for the present. For the last year or two he has received the rents of his tenants, and put the money away in what he calls his cash-boxes, three big, oaken chests."

"Rather an unsafe thing to do," hinted Morse.

"Who could break in here and steal them?" asked Ximena, laughing.

"Just so—the castle is strong, and the walls are high. The cash-boxes are safe enough—in his room."

"He does not keep them there."

She answered lightly, as if it were a matter of no moment. Shortly after, Morse remaining silent, she added:

"I do not know exactly where they are stored, but it is somewhere in the lower chamber or cells of the castle. Anselmo knows—he has them in his keeping."

There was nothing more to learn. It only remained for the two youths to get further information, concerning them from Romeo, and proceed to action.

They paid a visit of courtesy to the Hidalgo, and found him marvellously improved already. He was brighter, looked younger, and spoke to them with the geniality of a high-bred, good-natured gentleman.

"As I may be detained in my room for a day or two, you may probably wish to explore the castle," he said. "It is all old to me, but it may be interesting to you. Ximena will not venture with you into the dungeons. She hates them."

"They seem to be still echoing with the groans of suffering men," said Ximena, shivering.

Both Morse and Jim assured her that they would not

think of asking her to accompany them. "They would find additional pleasure in roaming about as they pleased, like explorers," Morse said.

"You will need my master-keys," said the Hidalgo, "for many of the doors, especially the lower ones, are locked. Ximena, you know where they are kept."

The senorita brought them from a drawer in an escritoire in the room, and handed them to Jim. They were three in number, and the Hidalgo explained that they were so constructed that each would open the doors on one of the three floors, the one on their level, that below it, and lastly the dungeons that were beneath the bed of the river.

They were not keys that one would care to carry in the pocket, each being fully half-a-pound in weight. Their construction was curiously simple and quaint—in short, they were skeleton-keys of the ancient times.

Thus furnished, only one thing was needed to explore the regions below, and that was a lantern, which the Hidalgo also supplied them with—a small, well-made one of modern construction, which being trimmed with colza oil, would burn for twelve hours.

A box of matches completed their outfit, and they started on their journey of exploration.

"We ought to find Romeo," suggested Morse.

Jim assented, and they hastened to the courtyard, where no less a person than Romeo himself had been waiting their coming for half an hour.

"Me 'spec you genelmen come 'long dis way," he said; "it 'bout time dat you speak to de Ridaldo 'bout de goin's on here."

"Nothing is to be said at present," replied Jim. "Speak low, for these old places have a trick of echoing the voice. Have you discovered anything further?"

"Dey got de boxes out ob de 'riginal place," whispered Romeo. "Me hear dem say so. But where dey put dem am a mystelry. Dey somewhar handy for putting off by de riber, dat for sure."

"Do you know the way to the dungeons below, Romeo?"

"Yes, Marse Jim; dere two lots, one on de top ob de oder, and bof under whar we standing."

"Could we get there without being seen?"

"Suttinly. All we hab to do is to go through dat door, turn to de lef', parse through a door, and dere we are. All de kitchens and sich places lay to de right."

This was good news, and as there was seemingly nobody about but themselves, they passed through the doorway Romeo had pointed out, and bore away to the left, down a cold stone passage but dimly lighted.

At the bottom of it they were stopped by a door which was locked. Romeo rubbed his woolly head.

"Now dat 'bout as sensible as anything my granfader eber did," he muttered. "Me forget dat it allus kep' fastened."

But Jim produced the master-key, and opened it, to the great astonishment of their sable friend.

"You make dat?" he exclaimed.

"No," replied Jim; "it was made some years before I was born."

"T'ink ob dat, now," murmured Romeo. "Now, here anoder door. You got anoder key, Marse Jim?"

"No, this will do," and Jim opened the door.

Ahead of them, lighted by an opening in the wall, was a flight of steps, but ere descending Morse lit his lantern. It was a powerful bull's-eye, and would serve all their requirements in the way of light.

At the bottom of the flight of steps was yet another door, also secured. Jim produced a second key, and opened it without the least trouble. Romeo stared as if he were some innocent countryman viewing a series of conjuring tricks for the first time.

"Mose t'ing me see for some time parse," he said, "gib me sort ob ticklers to t'ink ob, but dis beat de lot. How de pusson dat made dat key know it fit dis door?"

"I never heard him speak about it," replied Jim, gravely.

There were now in the region of what were known as the Upper Dungeons, where the more favoured prisoners of the olden time used to be confined.

Some of the doors were closed and fast, others were open to inspection, and, ranged on either side of various dark ways, they must have numbered more than a hundred.

Gloomy, forbidding places for the most part were they. In some there was a small opening to give light, either in the ceiling or in the wall. Here and there lay heaps of dust, all that was left of long-forgotten occupants, and such things as they had in their cells, but for the greater part they were barren and empty.

The doors that were closed and locked, in many instances refused to yield to the master-key, as indeed they would have done to any other, for the rust of ages held them fast.

But some that had undoubtedly not been opened for many, many years yielded, and not the least harrowing discovery they made was that of two skeletons chained to the wall just beyond the reach of each other.

"In life," said Morse, "it was their punishment to be near, and yet as wide apart as the Poles, so far as claspings hands went. It was a designed thing. They were very cruel in those days."

It was a surmise, but doubtless a correct one. It was in harmony with the known fiendish designs of the ancients, anyway.

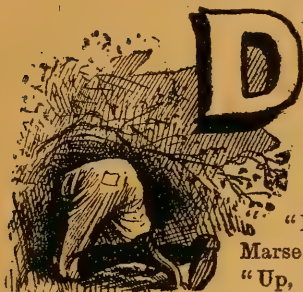
The very next cell revealed to them what they sought.

Bound with strong ropes, as if for transport, were

three brass-bound boxes about three feet long and eighteen feet square. By their weight it was certain that they held the cash of the Hidalgo.

CHAPTER CCCXII.

DESPOILING THE THIEVES.



DIS where dey put 'em!' said the delighted Romeo. "Now me 'member dat dey bring dem up." "Up!" exclaimed Morse.

"Dat de berry word, Marse Morse," said Romeo. "Up, so dat we may resume dey was 'riginally kep' in de lower dudgeons."

"You have a marvellous head, Romeo," said Jim. "Me 'spect it 'bout de bess head in de fambly," complacently replied Romeo.

"But why bring them here?" mused Jim.

"To be handy for the river," said Morse. "I judge that there is a way of communicating with it, without going up the stairway and out by the chief gate."

"Sure to be," said Jim; "but ere we try to find it, I vote we move these boxes into the next cell."

"Why there?" asked Morse.

"It is handy, and the least likely place they would be looked for. I reckon, too, that the existence of those skeletons is well known to the servants, or, at least, the legend of the dungeon."

"It would be better to get them up to the Hidalgo's room if we could."

"Let us not be in a hurry, Morse. Say we carried them up, how could we bring home the attempted robbery to the rascals? I think, too, that by simply hiding the boxes for the present, we may have some fun with the villains."

"I begin to see your scheme, Jim. It is all right, unless they find out what we have done with the stolen property, and succeed in getting it away after all."

"I'll undertake to stop them at that game."

"Very good, then. You shall have your way. Now let us be smart about it."

The boxes were of such a weight that the carrying of them was no light matter; but Romeo was as strong as a bull, and Jim fairly well up for muscular power, and between them the task was soon performed.

Morse carried the lantern, and the door of the skeleton cell being made fast, he closely examined the ground to see if they had left any trace of their proceedings.

But the hard stone floor had left none that he could

see, and reclosing the cell they had despoiled, they sought for the communication with the river.

It was found at last, but not without considerable trouble, for it had been purposely put away in a spot that would not have been easily discovered by a prisoner who might possibly get out of his dungeon.

It was, moreover, guarded by a strong gate, that was closed and heavily locked.

Through the bars the trio behind them then saw the water about five feet below. Gondolas and gay barges of the grandees glided to and fro. A small steamer went puffing by, and there were sounds of light laughter and song.

"Often have such sounds been heard by the captives," said Morse. "Merciful Heaven! what a life to be cooped up here!"

They found the way down to the lower dungeons, and paid them a brief visit.

One of the first they came to had recently been broken into. The door, old and rotten, wrenched from its hinges, lay upon the floor.

"Now who take de trouble to do dis?" cried Romeo.

"It is part of the rascal's scheme, I reckon," replied Morse. "Anselmo has a key. *He*, by ordinary reasoning, would have no occasion to force the door. Nor has he, but it will look as if the robbery was the work of some outside thieves."

"Golly! Marse Morse, you gih de nail a bang ob de head."

The lowest of the dungeons offered them little pleasure in exploring.

No light but that which they carried, dirt and damp, and a general sense of the horrible, soon drove them to the upper regions again.

"We know all we want to know," said Jim. "Let us go back to the pure air and sunlight."

They were all very willing, and on arriving at the level ground above the stone steps, Romeo was sent forward to scout, to see if any of the retainers were about.

He returned with the welcome intelligence that the way was clear, and a few minutes saw the two friends safely in the hall.

Romeo returned to the servants' quarters, lest his long absence should be commented on, and he was not there to account for it.

If an explanation proved necessary, he was quite ready to give it, even though he were obliged to enter into the regions of romance.

Ximena shortly after appeared in the hall, and expressed her surprise at their long visit to the dungeons.

"I thought you would tire of them in two minutes, and you have been gone over three hours," she said, "but no doubt you are tired of the dull company here. It is so little," she added, demurely.

They assured her they were nothing of the sort.

The dungeons were so interesting historically, or they would not have stayed so long.

"Please touch the gong," said Ximena; "it is long past the time for you to have what you English call luncheon."

The gong hung by the open hearth, and Morse sounded it. In response there appeared half a dozen retainers, bearing dishes of cold meat, and fruit, and vegetables for a salad.

Behind them came Anselmo, who having given a few directions to the rest, approached Ximena, and bowing low, asked if he might speak to her.

A motion of her hand gave the assent required. Anselmo produced a number of papers from his breast-pocket, which proved to be household accounts.

"I desire an audience with his excellency," he said, "to know if it his pleasure these charges be paid?"

"Pay them," said Ximena, indifferently, "and render an account of these charges to-morrow. His excellency must not be disturbed to-day."

Anselmo bowed and retired. Morse, who had heard what passed, smiled disdainfully as he whispered to Jim:

"The plot thickens. You saw and heard what passed?"

"Yes; he is going to pay the accounts, so that there will be no need for opening the cash-boxes for some time."

"Perhaps," said Morse, as they moved forward and joined Ximena at the table.

The luncheon was partaken of without the company of servants. It was only at the principal meal of the day that were admitted, according to ancient custom, at the table.

It was just over when Anselmo appeared again, this time with raised hands and eyes wild with horror. He was evidently a good actor.

"Senorita," he cried, "terrible tidings I have to tell the Hidalgo. Permit me to see him."

"You cannot see his excellency," replied Ximena.

"Tell me what it is. Have you been quarrelling among yourselves, and somebody is killed?"

"Worse than that, senorita. His excellency has been robbed."

"Not for the first time," calmly returned Ximena. "Who is the thief now?"

"Alas!" cried Anselmo, raising his eyes, "I know not. It is so serious, so great a thing, that I hesitate to tell to tell you what it is, senorita."

"You may tell me," she said.

"Behold, then," said Anselmo, with a dramatic wave of the hand, "I but now go down to the lower dungeons, where his excellency's gold is kept, and it is gone!"

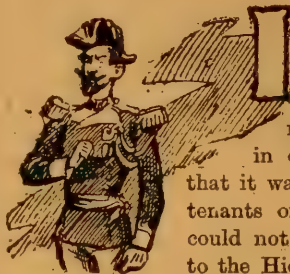
"Gone, you say?" exclaimed Ximena, startled.

The faces of Jim and Morse expressed interested surprise.

"The door broken down—the boxes gone," cried Anselmo, as he dashed an imaginary tear from his eye—"two hundred thousand ducats stolen."

CHAPTER CCCXII

THE COST OF INFIDELITY AND DISHONESTY.



I was a large sum to lose, and even Ximena, who had very little knowledge of pecuniary matters, stared at Anselmo in dismay. She knew, also, that it was a year's rent from the tenants of Seville, and its loss could not but prove embarrassing to the Hidalgo.

"How could it happen?" she demanded, impetuously. "There has been neglect somewhere."

"The deed has been done by somebody cognisant of the secrets of the castle," said Anselmo, keeping up the emotional farce, "somebody, who must have had duplicate keys of the upper doors. Senorita, I found all fast down to the very door."

"But who—*who*, I say, has done this thing?" asked Ximena.

"Alas!" sighed Anselmo, going upon another tack. "I know not. But if I conferred with the Hidalgo——"

"You know that he is not to be seen."

"True, senorita; he was in his laboratory last night, and after that he must, as heretofore, have two or three days' rest. If I cannot speak to him now, may I go to the alcalde?"

Ximena made a movement of dissent.

"You know also," she said, "that it would be distasteful to his excellency. He will have no interference with his private affairs."

It was plainly shown by the countenance of the rascal that he was aware of it. The plans for the perpetration of the robbery had been carefully thought out.

"To-morrow," he murmured, "would it be possible to speak to his excellency then?"

"Ask me to-morrow," said Ximena, abruptly, "but for the present I cannot have him disturbed by the story of his loss, great as it is."

"Senorita, it is a pity."

"You have heard me—go."

Anselmo bowed, and with many actions expressive of distress, left the hall. Ximena sighed deeply.

"It is a heavy loss," she said.

"And yet, possibly, not a loss after all," said Jim.

"I fail to understand you. Anselmo says the money is gone, and why should he lie?"

A glance was exchanged by Jim and Morse. From the latter it meant, "Tell her, but not here."

"Perhaps," said Jim, "I may be able to ease your mind. But if I might suggest that we retire to some room more excluded from possible espionage and eavesdroppers——"

"This is some jest of yours?"

"On my honour, no. It is not a jest, but a very serious matter."

"Come with me," said Ximena.

She was both puzzled and displeased, and on reaching the room wherein she had sung to Jim the night before, she sat down on a lounge and motioned for them to take the two chairs facing her.

"Will you speak, Morse?" said Jim.

"You are a better hand at telling a story than I am," was the reply.

So Jim told her all, with the result that her face cleared, and its expression changed from anger to pleased approval. It hardly needed the words of gratitude in her rejoinder to the final remarks of Jim.

"We thought it better to do this thing without troubling you. It was impossible to harass the Hidalgo. You will forgive us."

"You open my heart to you," she said. "I love you—both."

It was a girlish, innocent expression of her heart-felt thanks. Almost as soon as she ceased speaking she suddenly burst into laughter.

"It is a jest, too," she said. "What will the rascals think when they go for their plunder and find it gone?"

"There is no chance of suspecting its hiding-place?" suggested Jim, anxiously.

"None," she replied. "That dreadful dungeon into which you penetrated, and which you have made so much good use of, has a story known to all Seville. No man, woman, or child would enter it, for they believe that he who first sets foot in it is doomed to die."

"Let me see," said Jim, jocosely. "I was the first to enter after I had unlocked the door. For me is reserved the untimely end."

"You are not a believer in superstitions?"

"In very few, *senorita*. But would it not be as well for a watch to be kept, in case of accidental discovery?"

"It could be done from the summit of the eastern battlements," said Ximena, "which command a view of the river-gate. There is a bell-tower attached to it in which is a big bell which has not been rung for a hundred years or more. Stay, though! it was rung when the French came in sight of our watchers at Seville. It summoned all who could bear arms to defend the place."

"That was its original use, perhaps," suggested Morse.

"It was. Well, I do not think it will be rung to-night; but should there be any need of it, I will pull the old rope. We will watch together, we three. The hour chosen for the taking away of their fancied prize will of a certainty be about midnight. It is the quietest hour of the twenty-four, in Seville."

"You will punish the rascals, I presume?" said Jim.

"They may look for the galleys for life," replied Ximena, "or perhaps they may be sent away to Cuba to serve on one of the inland plantations, from which they cannot fly, unless at the risk of being hunted down by the dogs."

It was one way of admitting that the men who had played a part in this nefarious business would be slaves for life.

It only now remained to await the coming night, make sure of the complete foiling of their plans, and put the guilty ones under arrest.

"It will be done here, perhaps," said Ximena, "without troubling the authorities outside. They can be but few in number, and we have many faithful adherents still."

Romeo could be trusted—those who had known him so long were sure of that; but Ximena's experience of the black-skinned races made her doubtful. She wished to have him near her. It could be done by stating that she wished him to attend upon his masters.

Accordingly, Romeo was summoned, and all chance of his blurring out anything cut off by his being retained in the hall.

Without the Hidalgo, there would have been no dinner there but for the guests. As things were, it was in due time served as usual, and Ximena took the head of the table, with Jim and Morse on either side of her.

Among the servants, all deported themselves as usual, drinking freely towards the end of the feast, except Anselmo and two more.

They were the trio engaged in the nefarious business, and when Ximena retired with her guests, first to her room ere paying a visit to the Hidalgo, she said:

"Anselmo, Escardo, and Almontana—three, and no more!"

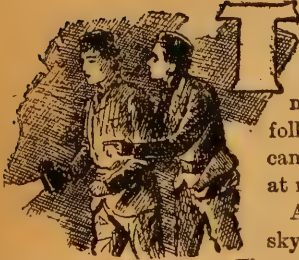
"They have friends outside," said Jim.

"We shall see," said Ximena. "And now his excellency must be awaiting us."



CHAPTER CCCXIV.

DOG EATS DOG.



THE cathedral clock solemnly tolled the hour of midnight, minor time-recorders following its lead, and then came silence. Seville was at rest.

A moon, lying low in the sky, cast long shadows over the housetops. The narrow streets that ran north and south were buried in gloom. On the eastern rampart three watchers waited for the outcome of their countermining.

Near them was a tall tower with an open doorway. Just inside it crouched Romeo, holding in his hands a rope ready for the senorita.

Ximena, with her two young cavaliers, leant upon the wall, all three looking down upon the river, striped with shadows and strips of moonlight.

By the river-gate of the dungeons lay a boat, with two oars in the bow, and an awning over the stern. It was one of the ordinary gondolas that by day were in numbers flitting about the river.

No man was in charge. The three robbers were bent on carrying everything out alone.

Half an hour of silence ensued, taxing the patience of those who waited and watched. Then there was a sound of shifting iron, and the river-gates swung back.

A man came cautiously creeping forth.

It was Anselmo.

He looked up and down the river, then put a hand to his ear and listened. All was as he desired, so he thought. Seville was at rest.

He stepped into the boat and shifted the oars, so as to be ready for immediate use. He lowered the curtains of the awning, so as to close the river side from spectators, if any should appear.

Then he stepped out, and disappeared for a moment.

But in an instant, as it seemed, he was back again with his two brother-conspirators, Escardo and Almontana. All were gesticulating violently.

And they were speaking in low, clear tones that lifted their words to the ears of the eager listeners.

"Gone, you say?" said Anselmo. "Now, heed me. If this is a trick of yours, both shall pay dearly for it!"

"No trick of mine," said the taller of the two, Escardo. "More likely you and Almontana have combined to deceive me. It would be so easy to

stab me as I return by the passages, and so many places are in the castle to hide one poor body."

"This is but mocking me!" said Almontana—a farce to deceive me. Speak out, you two, and tell me where the cash-boxes are, or, as I live, I will cry aloud for the night patrol, and tell the whole story! You shall not laugh at me for a fool!"

"A fool yourself!" hissed Anselmo. "I know nothing—I have done nothing!"

"A lie!" cried Escardo, raising his voice.

"Peace," implored Anselmo. "You will bring the patrol upon us."

"A fig for your patrol!" said Escardo.

"Perhaps the boxes are in another dungeon," said Anselmo. "We may have made a mistake. Let us return and see if it is so."

"Go yourself," said Almontana, scornfully, "and bring them here!"

"You fear me, then?" hissed Anselmo.

"No!" was the fierce answer, and a knife flashed in the moonlight.

The two men flew at each other, and quick almost as thought, Anselmo received a blow in the breast that sent him staggering back into the river. Then Almontana turned, in a fury, and closed with Escardo.

A struggle between two men could end in but one way on that narrow platform. Locked in each other's arms, they tumbled into the cold water, and disappeared, to rise no more.

It was all so quickly done that the murderous scene was over ere the watchers had drawn a breath. When the two men fell, Ximena uttered a slight scream, and covered her face with her hands.

"It was no scene for you," said Jim, turning towards her, and Morse also turned his attention to her. Neither had seen Anselmo go down.

But when a minute later they gazed at the river and saw no living thing upon it, they believed that he had shared the fate of his companions in crime.

"What did I tell you?" said Ximena, turning up her agitated face: "the bell will not ring to-night. With their own hands they have punished each other. So let them go. Are you bold enough to go down and close the gates?"

"I will do it alone," replied Jim.

"Nay, we shall all go," said Ximena. "We have the keys and lantern ready."

"It is no place for you at this hour," urged Jim.

"I am going," she said, unmoved.

"Romeo, you may come away from that rope."

"Dere been a bit ob bobbery below, Marse Jim?"

"Something has happened. You shall know about it to-morrow."

"Dere no corpses 'bout," murmured Romeo, as he peered over the parapet. "'Spec' dey gone in to fight it out."

"We are going down below."

Romeo was worried with all this mystery. He would have given something to know exactly what had taken place, but he was not gratified. It was an oversight of Jim's, who was not thinking of the negro's consuming curiosity, but the advisability of getting down below and closing the gates as soon as possible.

The lantern was lighted, and they stole down to the entrance to the dungeons. It took very little time to reach the open door of the dungeon from which the boxes had been removed.

"Stay," said Ximena; "let us make sure that no third conspirator has been here."

"The sight within the dungeon is not for you," urged Jim.

"I am not afraid," said Ximena; "why should I be? Do not forget that you first entered there."

She attempted to speak lightly, but her voice suddenly failed her, and she burst into tears.

"Better had they taken the money," she sobbed, "then you would not be doomed."

"I don't believe there is anything in the superstition," said Jim, lightly. "Come, *senorita*, even if there is, I am not worth weeping for."

"You are my friend," she answered, drying her eyes. "Now, will you open the door?"

She was not to be dissuaded. So the door was opened, and they entered in, Romeo excepted. He remained outside.

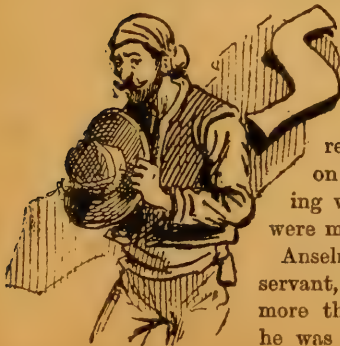
The boxes were still there, and, after a hasty glance at the pair of grim skeletons, they retired.

The gates were sought, found, and closed. Then, the work of the night done, they hastened back to the hall.

"Say nothing," said Ximena, as a parting word. To-morrow there will be three missing. Dog has eaten dog. It is enough. Let others think what they will, we know the truth. *Senors*, good-night!"

CHAPTER CCCXV.

DESPARTOLA THE MATADOR.



STRANGE to say, there was very little surprise expressed by the retainers of the castle on the following morning when the three men were missing.

Anselmo was a trusted servant, all knew, but it was more than suspected that he was not so trustworthy

as he ought to be. Escardo and Almontana were far from popular, being both of a violent, overbearing dis-

position. Neither of the latter held a position of importance.

The absence of the men was reported to Ximena, who promised to mention it to the Hidalgo, and there the matter dropped.

Two days of a quiet life ensued. Jim and Morse strolled about the city during the day, accompanied by Ximena or alone.

As yet they had no need of money, and postponed their visit to the bank. Indeed, it was barely time for the remittance they expected to arrive.

Strolling about the fashionable quarter in the morning, afternoon, or evening, they were objects of envious interest to many a young Spanish gallant who would gladly have paid court to Ximena.

But the Hidalgo had never encouraged such visitors to the castle, and the girl had been practically living alone.

"But see, now," said they one to another, "we are good enough for other families, but not for the *Toreomez*. The Hidalgo must needs go abroad to import a lover."

There were a number of the young bloods of Spain in a café talking thus, when a handsome man of five-and-twenty came sauntering in.

He was a little above the medium height, square about the shoulders, and by his movements one might consider him to be as lithe as a panther.

He was a stranger to all there, for he sat down at one of the tables without being favoured with a sign of recognition.

He ordered some wine of a waiter, and lit a cigarette. The half-dozen young bloods continued their chattering.

"The Hidalgo chooses young lovers," said one; "they are but mere boys."

"And why two?" asked another.

"It matters not," said a third; "it is common talk in the saloons of our best people that the Hidalgo seeks a lover for his Ximena from England."

The stranger turned in his seat, and quietly introduced himself in speech.

"Pardon me, *senors*, are you speaking of the trio of young people who were by the river this afternoon?" A haughty general stare was all the reply he received.

Having waited a few moments, he said calmly:

"I asked a question, and I require an answer. Which of you will give it?"

"None," said one, who was nearest to him.

"Possibly I may require it of you," was the cool rejoinder. "Say, then, am I right?"

No answer.

The stranger sat back in his chair, lightly flapping a pair of gloves he held in his right hand upon the back of his left one.

The party near him resumed their conversation, but he speedily interrupted it by rising and seizing the shoulder of the man nearest to him.

"Answer me!" he said, fiercely.

"I will not," was the answer.

With the gloves the stranger dealt the speaker a smart blow across the face. In a moment all were on their feet, and guests from other parts of the room became suddenly interested. There was a movement among the waiters as if to draw near in a body and check the rising disturbance.

At that moment, as if to complete the scene of dramatic interest, Jim and Morse entered the café.

"You know the consequences of that blow?" said the young Spaniard who had received it.

"I am at your service," was the polite reply. "May I ask your name?"

"I," said the other, proudly, "am the Duke of Valladolid. And yours?"

"I," said the stranger, "am merely a commoner known as Despartola, the matador."

The sensation created by this announcement was profound, it hit so many ways against the man he had smitten with his glove.

A duke to fight a matador! Almost impossible! Besides, he was the finest swordsman in Spain, and the choice of weapons was his.

Pride of family forbade the duke to go on with the affair: the fear of being branded as a coward would not allow him to retreat. It was a most painful position for the nobleman to be in.

"You hesitate," said the matador.

"I will fight you," answered the duke, in a low tone. "Here is my friend, who will stand as my second"—he pointed towards a tall, handsome young Spaniard who was twirling his moustache. "An introduction is scarcely necessary."

This was a second insult. The matador received it with a smile of contempt.

"I," he said, "am but a stranger here. I must have one I do not know to act for me."

He looked round him, caught sight of the two friends, and recognising them, promptly singled out Jim.

"Senor," he said, "will you favour me?"

"I would rather not," answered Jim, "I know nothing of these matters."

"There will be no life lost," said the matador, in a voice so low that it did not reach any other ears than those of the two friends.

"You promise me that?" said Jim, in the same tone.

"On my honour as—the leading matador of Spain."

It was a tempting position, and Jim could not resist. He yielded.

"Though scarcely old enough to take a share in such an affair," he said, "I will act as your friend."

"Thanks, senor. You have answered as becomes the son of a brave people and a great nation."

The matador drew aside; and now that there was the prospect of a duel, and no further disturbance in the café, the waiters went about their business, and the other guests settled into their seats, excepting the second of the duke, who beckoned to Jim to come aside with him.

"Mind this," whispered the matador: "I have the choice, and fight with swords."

"I understand," replied Jim.

The youngster rose to the occasion in a very wonderful manner. He surprised even his friend Morse.

"You will pardon me," he said to the other second, "but although an introduction to Despartola was unnecessary, it is necessary in my case."

The Spaniard twirled his moustache. It was an awkward position for him. Jim was the guest of the Hidalgo Toreomez, and his social position was so far defined. What Jim might be at home he did not know.

Turning to the duke, he said:

"Introduce me."

"The Hidalgo Caridad," said the duke.

Jim quietly gave his name in return, and the two appointed seconds stepped aside to confer.

All the preliminaries were soon settled. The weapons, fencing-swords, and the place, behind the western wall of the Hidalgo Toreomez's castle; the time, an hour later, so as to get the affair over before sunset.

"You must go back to the castle," said Jim to Morse, "and let Ximena know that I shall be detained until close upon the dinner-hour. Then join us at the appointed spot."

"I am to give no reason for your absence, of course?" said Morse.

"You may give any reason but the right one," replied Jim.

CHAPTER CCCXVI.

THE DUEL BY THE CASTLE WALL.



IMEDIATELY behind the castle there was a broad moat, which had long been dry. Once upon a time it had held water thirty feet deep; but since the days of Napoleon it had been blocked up at the supply-end by fallen masonry.

The moisture had gradually evaporated, leaving a broad, sandy bottom, which had become covered with thin, fine grass interspersed with flowers. A more suit-

able place for a duel could not possibly have been selected.

It was, in the first place, semi-private ground. The idlers of the city never ventured there. Not that the Hidalgo would have done or said much if they had; but the name of Toreomez was sufficient to check all liberties on the part of the ordinary population.

There was no feeling of fear of interruption to deter the parties in the meeting arranged, and at the hour decided upon they met.

The sun was already so low in the sky that its rays were not a deterrent to either, whatever position he might take up. The moat was in shadow, although the massive walls overhead were ablaze with the red sunlight.

The young duke was cool, and Despartola treated the affair lightly. He talked with Morse, who had performed his errand and joined the party, while Jim and the Hidalgo Caridad arranged the preliminaries.

The ground was chosen—a level spot almost clear of grass. Then the fencing-swords supplied by Despartola were duly examined and tested.

That much done, the combatants stripped to their waists, leaving on only their shirts and lower clothing.

The duke was young and active; but it was impossible not to note, even in his walk, that he was far from being as lithe as his antagonist. Despartola moved with a feline grace, and the moment he grasped his sword it looked like a weapon in the hands of a master.

Jim naturally felt himself to be a novice in duelling affairs; but he endeavoured with considerable success not to betray it. The Spaniards were both surprised and pleased by his bearing, and Caridad remarked to him that it was assuredly not his first affair of honour.

"I have seen some fighting, and been mixed up with it," replied Jim.

"Ah! I thought so," said the Hidalgo.

The combatants took up a position facing each other. There was the question from the Hidalgo, "Are you ready, senors?" and the swords crossed.

Despartola toyed with his weapon as one at play, but the duke was desperately in earnest, knowing that he had, as we say at home, "all his work cut out for him."

The reflected light from the castle walls played softly upon the steel, and Jim and Morse, with bated breath, kept their eyes on the weapons as they glided up and down. For a time the combatants were content with watching each other. At length the duke, with a quick movement, lunged at his antagonist. His sword was turned aside as if it had been a straw wafted by the wind.

"The duke is a doomed man," whispered Jim, hastily. He was beginning to mistrust the matador.

"Wait!" answered Morse.

He was closely observing Despartola, around whose lips a meaning smile was playing.

The bull-fighter was in no hurry. Here again there was something of the feline disposition. It was the cat playing with the mouse.

And the duke seemed to be aware of it, for gradually his face lost its deep rich brown hue and assumed the pallor that is born of anxiety.

He lunged again, with no better effect. Despartola made no return.

Jim bit his lip. He did not care for what he looked upon as a needless prolonging of the misery of a foe, and at the same time he began to count up the cost of his being mixed up in such a one-sided affair.

Would the Hidalgo like it? What would Ximena say?

The proud nobleman would keenly feel the defeat of one of his class by a mere bull-fighter. The matador, like all of his order, came of the peasant class, and for a duke to die by his hand would be deemed a dishonour.

A third lunge from the duke, was retaliated by a prick upon his arm, bestowed by the matador.

It was not painful, but it irritated him, and the fires of rage flashed into his eyes.

Anger was taking possession of him—a fatal thing in a duel with such an antagonist, who had learnt to keep cool as he faced a maddened bull, whose horns would rend the life out of him if he made one false movement or the least mistake.

From steady fencing the duke went on to wild thrusting, and the swords moved rapidly up and down, to the right and to the left, above and below.

Suddenly the weapon of the duke was seen to fly in the air right up to the top of the moat, where it lodged among the grass on the summit of the sloping bank.

Instantly the sword of Despartola was lowered, but the duke threw his arms open wide.

"Strike!" he said.

"By the saints—no!" replied Despartola. "I can defend my honour, but I am not a murderer."

"Well said," muttered Jim.

The duke slowly lowered his arms, regarding his generous antagonist with a curious expression of face.

"You will not strike?" he said.

"No," was the answer. "Your grace will perceive, if you will regard your arm for a moment, that enough has been done to satisfy an honourable man. I have shed blood. It is enough. I will not commit murder, nor go on with a duel that is so one-sided."

"I did not expect——" began the duke, and then he paused.

"To find so much of the better feeling in a matador," said Despartola, completing the sentence for him. "Your grace, it is time you made a study of

the common people. There are some among us who are worthy sons of Spain."

The duke held out his hand, and Despartola grasped it.

"The farce is over," he said; "let it be forgotten."

"You have taught me a lesson to-day," replied the duke, "I shall not easily forget. I came here to die. But you have given me my life. I shall remember it."

"See here," said Despartola, breaking his sword across his knee: "this will account for the end of our meeting. I wounded you, I broke this sword—no matter how or in whose hand it was. Seville will be satisfied. For it is against the rules of duelling to strike when a sword is broken. You may trust me to give no version of this meeting that will reflect upon your grace's courage. I should lie if I did so."

"And I, on my part," said Jim, "will be silent. I speak for my friend also."

"I [would I could make some return for all this," said the duke, "but I cannot. The debt is too great. Still, there is one thing I can do, Despartola, to show how I appreciate you as a man, and that is, if you will honour me with your company in public to dinner this night, I shall be glad."

Despartola was but a man, and, reared in the caste atmosphere of Spain, he felt that here indeed was an honour offered him. It would have been folly to refuse.

"And you, senors," said the duke, "you, too, must join us."

Jim would fain have declined, but Morse whispered to him that he would again hasten to the castle and explain that they had made acquaintance with the young nobleman, who had invited them to dine. He was sure it would be approved of.

So the invitation was accepted, and the café where they first met aptly chosen as the place wherein all Seville was to learn that Despartola and the duke were on terms of friendship.

As they climbed the bank of the moat, the sun went down.

"I looked upon it as my last as I descended to meet you, Despartola," said the duke, smiling, "but save for some mischance to-night, I shall see another, and many more to follow."

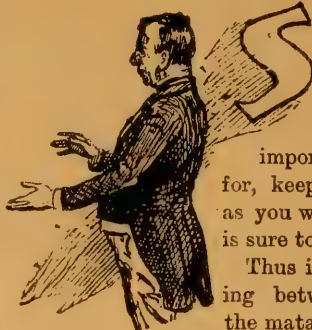
"May your grace live long," answered the matador.

But that wish was not to be fulfilled, as we shall find anon.



CHAPTER CCCXVII.

AN EVENING IN SEVILLE.—THE FATE OF A SERENADER.



SURELY there must be some unseen whispering spirits abroad when anything exciting or of importance is impending, for, keep the matter as close as you will, some inkling of it is sure to get abroad.

Thus it was with the meeting between the duke and the matador.

The original quarrel was by that time known all over Seville, and many were acquainted, either by guesswork or through the ghostly whisperings above referred to, with the place of meeting, nay, of the very hour of it.

Of course, there could be but one ending to it, in the popular mind. The skill of Despartola as a swordsman was well known, and, of course, he would kill the duke.

"What a reputation he will make!" was the general exclamation; "it will be written down in the history of Spain."

Among men of Despartola's class there was nothing but exultation, tinged with a little envy. It was rarely that one of their class had an opportunity to establish an imperishable reputation. Indeed, only one case, and that was of a hundred years ago, and somewhat hazy in its tradition, of a similar nature could be recalled.

On the other hand, the noblemen were proportionately depressed.

One of their class was to be slain by a matador, and they could not avenge him, for it was not possible, let alone its being so perilous a thing, to call out Despartola.

"We cannot go on fighting these fellows," they said, "and Valladolid was a fool to engage himself in such an unworthy affair. He should have refused to fight, as he was entitled to do."

Within the café there was a strong assemblage of the richer and higher-born classes; outside, quite a mob of ordinary people had assembled. Both were awaiting the tidings of the duke's death.

Of course, it would have been easy, in a sense, to wander in the direction of the scene of the duel and learn the tidings there, but to unwarrantably intrude on such an occasion was an unpardonable offence. Therefore to the café they had come to await the news in a becoming manner.

But a great shock of surprise awaited the public.

The portion outside first received it when they saw Despartola and the Duke of Valladolid approaching side by side, the former with the weapons carried carelessly under his arm, wrapped in a cloak.

"By Saint Giralda!" cried a swarthy fellow, who would have made a model brigand on the stage, and perchance off it, "they are walking as friends."

"There has been no duel," said another, "the duke has apologised to a matador."

"You are a fool," was the polite rejoinder of the first speaker. "Can you not see that his grace's right arm is carried stiffly?"

His keen eyes had detected a fact. The wound given by Despartola, though a minor one, had not been without effect. One of the muscles of the arm had been pierced, and a rigidity was setting in.

His grace would have to carry his arm in a sling for a day or two. Nothing better could have happened.

Surprise and ignorance of the entire facts kept the mob outside silent as the party passed through to the café. As soon as they got inside Despartola carelessly tossed the swords upon the nearest table, with the result that they fell to the floor. In picking them up, he apparently accidentally, pulled off the wrapper, and the broken sword with its companion rattled on the boards.

Fifty pairs of eyes beheld the shattered weapon, and then the whole thing was clear.

Of course it was Despartola's weapon that had thus been broken—as, indeed, it was—and the duke had accomplished the feat. He had done it in spite of being wounded, and thus the duel had ended in a most satisfactory manner.

They did not quite like his returning in the company of his antagonist, but that was a matter for his own consideration.

All round, the high-born observers were satisfied.

But they asked no questions and made no open remark. Either would have been bad form, and might justly be resented as an impertinence.

The duke chose a table in a conspicuous place, and ordered dinner to be laid thereon. While it was being prepared the whole party adjourned to adjoining premises for a bath.

A splendid dinner was served, and, without undue hilarity, was partaken of with thorough enjoyment. The duke and his Hidalgo friend were at their best. Despartola conducted himself admirably, striking the happy medium between an inferior and a boon companion.

Jim and Morse enjoyed it as a novel experience.

It seemed that Despartola was to exhibit his prowess as a matador two days hence, and he expressed a hope that Jim would be there.

"The Hidalgo Toreomez," he said, "will attend as a matter of duty. He will bring the senorita, his

daughter, also. You cannot, as an honoured guest, stay away."

Jim promised to be there if the Hidalgo Toreomez came. But it struck him as being hardly the place for Ximena, and he hoped she would not be there.

But then he knew little of the daughters of Spain. Ximena was at that moment dwelling on the coming pleasure the bull-fight would afford her. So much in these matters depends on early training and associations.

It was late—past the hour of eleven—when the party broke up. Jim and Morse had to return alone, as the way of the rest lay in the opposite direction.

"I would offer to escort you to the castle," said the duke, "but I know the independent spirit of your people. You would feel hurt. There is no danger, although the hour is late, if you walk in the middle of the road."

The latter part of his speech was suggestive. No place could be deemed exactly safe if one were obliged to walk in the middle of the road. But, without comment, Jim and Morse bade their acquaintances adieu, and started for the castle.

"Isn't there a nigger song appropriate to the wind-up of the evening?" asked Jim. "I fancy I have heard Romeo sing it."

"What is it like?" asked Morse.

"It is something about keeping in 'de middle ob de road," answered Jim. "Falling tiles, I believe, inspired the negro melody; but we have nothing of the sort to anticipate here."

"The duke thought it possible that some thief might be abroad," said Morse. "You have no weapon with you, I suppose?"

"A penknife," said Jim, smiling.

"Well, the middle of the road is the place for us. Listen! There is the everlasting guitar."

"Don't you like it?"

"It is an appropriate instrument for the place and the people, but if a fellow went tinkling about London with it he would be ordered on, or given a few coppers to dry up."

"Morse, you have no ear for music. Think how Ximena plays the guitar."

"All the world are not Ximenas, and there are very few like her in Spain, I guess."

"Poor chemicals!" sighed Jim, reverting to an old joke.

"Oh, dry up on that tack," said Morse, testily.

The guitar that had attracted their attention was being played in one of the long, narrow streets off the broad thoroughfare they were traversing.

They paused at the end of it to get a glimpse of the serenader.

One side of the street was bright with moonlight, and the other lay in deep shadow. The serenader

stood beneath the windows of a tall house with the moonlight shining on him.

He was richly dressed, far more so than one would expect in the inhabitant of such a street, which was occupied by middle-class traders.

This fact struck Jim, and he whispered to Morse :

"That is some swell making love to a girl socially beneath him."

"He wants his head punched," grunted Morse. "But he doesn't play badly."

Nor did he. The hand of the serenader was a light one, and touched the strings with the ease of experience and a natural musical gift.

His song was of love, of course, and this was his

SERENADE.

When the silvery moonbeams sleep
On the waters of the deep,
My languid eyes their vigils keep,
And fondly turn to thee.

When the night wind softly blows
On the bosom of the rose ;
When the weary seek repose,
I fondly think of thee.

Sleep, then, my darling, sleep.
May slumbers light be thine.
I would not have thee wake to weep,
Or share one pang of mine.
Sleep, love, sleep !

The singer's voice was a sweet tenor, and the hour and the scene added a charm to the song. The listeners were moved to a feeling of soft sadness that was strangely pleasant. But ere they could make any comment or pass on, a terrible thing happened.

Out from the deep shadow of the house opposite the serenader rushed a tall young man, whose attire showed that he belonged to the humbler classes.

The singer heard him, and faced about, only to receive the broad blade of a knife in his breast.

Once, twice, thrice the assassin struck with marvellous rapidity, and then bounding away down the narrow street, was lost to view.

CHAPTER CCCXVIII.

THE FACE THAT WAS SEEN IN THE GLOOM.



THE work of the assassin was so quickly done that the two spectators had no time to interfere, or even to utter a cry. The murdered man had fallen in a heap upon his guitar, the strings of which were broken by the violence of his fall.

For a moment neither Jim nor Morse knew what

they ought to do, but it chanced at the instant that one of the night-gendarmes came sauntering along, and to him they pointed out what had happened.

"It is nothing new," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "If a girl is pretty, they will haunt her. Why do they not keep among their own people?"

He strolled down the street, accompanied by the two friends. A brief examination showed that the worst had happened to the serenader. He would never sing again in this world.

"It is the Governor's son," said the gendarme. "He has been warned, but he was always a rash, hot-headed youth. There will be grief in his home to-night. It will be well for you, seniors, to know nothing of the affair. You can do no good."

"I should know the assassin again," said Jim.

"You think so, senior, but you would go wrong in picking him out of a dozen members of his family. And so many will swear he was at home when it happened."

"You know him, then?" said Jim.

"I may, as a man knows a thing in his mind," answered the gendarme, "but that is nothing. Take my advice : have nothing to do with it. See, now. He who lies here was in the wrong. The girl was not for him. He would never have made her happy. It is Spanish justice. The true lover could do no less."

His hearers felt that he was right, so far as the good they could do by interfering was concerned, although they could not recognise the right of any man, no matter what his nation might be, to assassinate even an unworthy rival.

Jim gave the gendarme a few ducats, for which he was profusely thankful, and then, with Morse, sauntered on towards their home, as they at the time considered the castle to be.

The varied experiences of the day seemed to have lengthened it in an incomprehensible manner, and the remark of Jim that it appeared to him to be a week since he was in bed drew from Morse no expression of surprise.

"The day has been very long," he said.

The populace had vanished from the streets, for it was now close upon midnight. The castle loomed up stately and solemn as they drew near it, and the gates were closed.

"We are very late," remarked Jim. "I hope there is somebody sitting up for us."

"Sure to be," replied Morse.

They had to pass a line of buildings, which had the appearance of deserted stables, probably once occupied by the horses of the Hidalgo, for they ran up to the walls, and might have had a communication with the interior. Most of the doors were gone, or lying upon the ground, and the windows had shared the fate of houses long to let, by being knocked out

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.

The Island School.



"Strike!" said the Duke.

"By the saints, no!" replied Despartola.
but I am not a murderer."

"I can defend my honour,

In passing one of them Jim fancied he saw a white face in the gloom. He stopped short, and if it had indeed been there, it promptly vanished.

"Some skulking tramp, perhaps," he thought.

The entrance-gate they were seeking was on the western side of the castle, and to reach it they had to cross a bridge spanning the dry moat. It reminded them of the castle on the island, and the gateway appeared to be of a similar age and structure.

Outside hung the handle of a bell, which Morse pulled, while Jim sat down upon the parapet, dreamily thinking of many things.

The summons was not immediately responded to, and Morse, having waited a while, rang again.

He was getting impatient, the prospect of being locked out for the night being far from agreeable.

"The night-porter wants waking up," he remarked to Jim, without, however, looking back.

"Eh? Did you speak?" asked Jim, rising.

"I was casting reflections on the night-porter," answered Morse, as he laid hold of the bell-handle for the third time. He pulled it heartily, and the clang of the bell rose clearly on the night air.

"That ought to waken him," he muttered, and putting his ear to the door by the keyhole, he listened for the longed-for footsteps.

To his joy, he heard them, and in a moment more the gate was drawn back.

"Your pardon, senor," said the attendant, "but the Hidalgo retired early, and his other retainers following so good an example, I fell asleep."

"It is a matter of no moment," replied Morse, as he entered.

"Is the senor alone?" asked the attendant.

Morse stopped short, surprised by the question.

"No," he said; "my friend is with me. He——"

Morse looked back, and for a moment could see nothing of Jim. But a second glance showed him lying in the shadow of the parapet of the bridge, upon his face.

"Merciful Heaven!" he exclaimed. "What has happened to him?"

He ran back, accompanied by the attendant. They raised Jim up, and saw that his eyes were closed, and his cheeks white from sudden shock.

"He has fainted, senor," said the attendant.

But Morse, who had his arm around Jim, feared it was something worse. Feeling a moisture upon his hand, he drew it away, and saw that it was covered with blood.

"He has been stabbed in the back!" he gasped.

"Stabbed, senor?" muttered the bewildered man.

Close by, upon the ground, lay a long, keen dagger, with which the crime had doubtless been committed, for its blade, half-way down, was darkened with the victim's blood.

The grief of Morse was overwhelming.

"I feared evil would arise out of our coming to Seville," he moaned.

He looked about him, as the attendant did also, but there was no living creature in sight. Who could have done the deed?

Jim was unconscious, but he still breathed, and Morse bade the attendant help him to carry Jim into the castle.

"Waken two or three of your fellows," he said; "and if there is a doctor, fetch him here."

"And of the Hidalgo and the senorita?"

"Do not disturb them as yet. Hasten, I say."

They carried poor Jim in, and laid him upon a rude couch in a small room near the gate, occupied by the attendant.

Both water and towels were there, and a light burning.

Bidding the man lose no time in executing the command he was charged with, Morse hurriedly removed a portion of the upper clothing of Jim, and turning him over upon his side, examined the wound.

It was a clean stab, and the blood was flowing fast. How far the weapon had penetrated Morse could not tell.

He washed the wound, and bound it up as well as he was able with the materials at his command, then, in an agony, awaited the return of the attendant with the doctor.

Two of the other servants, too sleepy and dazed to be of much service, arrived, and were told to fetch some brandy, if any was available. They had a little in their keeping, and Morse, pouring some into a tumbler, endeavoured to administer it to Jim.

But although he succeeded in getting it into the mouth, there was no action of swallowing. So he refrained from using more for the present.

Would the doctor never come?

Surely it must be an hour since the attendant went in search of one? As a matter of fact, it was barely a fourth of that time when the man returned with the tidings that a doctor of great local reputation was dressing, and would be there with all speed.

Another anxious ten minutes ensued.

Jim did not stir, but lay quite still, save for the heaving of his chest caused by his heavy breathing.

At last the man of medicine appeared, grizzled and wan of face from long study. He bowed to Morse, and proceeded to examine the patient without uttering a word.

He expressed no disapproval of the rough dressing of the wound, but attended to it in his own way, using sundry materials he had brought with him in a small leather bag.

"How did this happen?" he asked, speaking for the first time.

Morse was not especially addressed, but the answer by rights came from him.

He told all he knew. The doctor listened with his eyes upon the patient, as if watching for some change in him.

"You saw nobody?" he said, when the story of their arrival at the gate was told.

"Not a creature."

"And he was close behind you?"

"He was sitting on the parapet of the bridge when I walked into the gate to ring.

"You rang. How?"

It was the attendant who answered now.

"The senor rang with much force," he said.

"As if in a hurry?"

"It was so, doctor."

"Humph!"

The wan, wrinkled face was turned towards Morse, and his close-set eyes looked him through and through.

"You two are friends?" he said.

"We are more than brothers," answered Morse, with a groan.

"There is no ill blood between you?"

"There never has been."

Morse was getting resentful in his manner. He did not like being cross-examined in this fashion by this Spanish disciple of Æsculapius.

The doctor asked no more questions just then, but again turned his attention to Jim, feeling his pulse, listening to his breathing, and otherwise showing that he had a case which gave him some anxiety.

There was a silence of many minutes, broken eventually by the doctor.

Once more regarding Morse in his scrutinising way, he said:

"There is no need for you to remain up. Go to your bed."

"I would rather remain here," answered Morse.

"I shall remain myself, senor," was the curt rejoinder, "and absolute quietude being necessary, I must ask you to retire. If you do not, I cannot be responsible for your friend. Indeed, I will not remain."

He was very firm, and Morse, feeling that he could really do nothing for Jim, prepared to go.

"One more question," he said, pausing by the door. "He will not die?"

"I cannot tell," replied the doctor; "the wound is both deep and dangerous."



CHAPTER CCCXIX.

THE PERILOUS CASE OF JIM.



WITH feelings that may be better imagined than described, Morse sought his chamber, where he found all things ready for him, down to a lamp alight. But sleep was not in his thoughts.

How could he sleep after what he had heard? A

wound that "was deep and dangerous" might prove fatal, and that speedily.

Sleep! It was impossible.

Morse threw himself into a chair, and tried to work out the problem offered by the crime. Ere long he gave it up.

There did not seem to be any solution of it.

Had he seen or known of the face Jim observed in the ruined stabling, he would have had a clue. But he did not see that face, nor had Jim made any remark concerning it.

Again, how was it that anyone could steal up and strike him in the back without giving some sort of warning of his coming? It was altogether a most inscrutable affair—a mystery of mysteries. He could make nothing at all of it.

In the questioning of the doctor he saw the elements of suspicion directed towards himself, and that was especially hard to bear.

He injure Jim! *He* attempt to assassinate the one creature he really loved in the wide world! It was the bitterest thing he had ever had to endure.

But when he came to think matters over he saw how suspicion might creep into ordinary minds.

What could these Spaniards know of the close tie between him and his wounded companion, his confidant, his more than brother?

He rang the bell the last time, the only time the attendant heard it, with the haste of one who is in need of help or in great haste. That act was not entirely devoid of suspicion to the Spaniards. The absence of all signs of the assassin, the unlikelihood of a complete stranger attacking Jim by the very castle gate, all told against Morse and supported the theory of his guilt which the doctor had undoubtedly set up in his mind.

"But what care I for such as he?" muttered Morse, contemptuously. "It will not be so with the Hidalgo and Ximena. Ah! It will hurt her. Better that I had been killed outright."

Thus he sat meditating until sleep, when it seemed

to be further from him than ever, suddenly descended upon him.

He went off, and sat as if bereft of life. If he dreamt, he never afterwards remembered it, but descended into unconsciousness, from which he was awakened without having the slightest knowledge of how the time had passed away.

The old man who had looked to their wants was there with a tray on which the chocolate was steaming.

It was daylight, and, judging by the strength of it, probably getting late.

"The senorita sent this?" said Morse.

"No," was the grave reply. "The senorita is not herself this morning."

"She has heard, then, what happened last night?"

"She has, senor. It troubles her almost as much as if her father had died."

"My friend," exclaimed Morse, hurriedly—"he is not dead?"

"No, senor. But he knows nothing, and talks wildly."

"Is the doctor still with him?"

"He has never left him, senor."

Morse drank his chocolate—eating was not to be thought of—and, having laved his face, went below to the hall. Nobody but one of the attendants was there. On the table were the remnants of a breakfast that had been poorly partaken of.

"The senorita is with the unfortunate Senor Gordon," said the attendant; "she will remain there while the doctor goes to see his other patients."

"And the Hidalgo?"

"As yet he knows nothing of—the misfortune."

There was a constrained air about the man that angered Morse, but having other things to think of, he speedily forgot all about it.

If Ximena were with Jim he could be there also, and, after mooning about for a time, he sauntered towards the room in which he lay.

Jim's condition must have been a perilous one, for his removal to a better apartment had been prohibited by the doctor. Nor had he as yet recovered consciousness.

Ximena raised her eyebrows as Morse entered the room. She looked anxious, and the bloom of her cheek was gone, as if she had passed a long time of sorrow.

"I did not expect you here," she said.

"Am I not permitted to see my dearest friend?" asked Morse. "Why should the doctor restrict me?"

"Your dearest friend!" said Ximena, shrugging her shoulders—"ah, yes."

Again Morse was puzzled. The air of the girl was very peculiar, and she did not extend her hand as usual as a morning greeting.

"I cannot understand the doctor or you," said Morse, after a moment or—he left out the attendants. "It seems to me as if I had done something wrong."

"Have you not?" asked Ximena, her eyes brightening.

"No; nothing more than one does in the ordinary course of life. You are changed to me. What does it mean?"

"It is not for me to explain," said Ximena, "but I can say that *this* was not necessary."

She waved her hand towards Jim, and Morse echoed her last word, "Necessary?"

"No," she said. "I liked him, as a handsome, high-spirited boy. He was nothing more than that to me."

"Again I must confess to feeling perplexed," returned Morse.

They were speaking in a low tone, although they might have shouted without arousing the unconscious Jim.

"If I could only speak to you," murmured Ximena. "I *will*! Do you not like me a little?"

The face of the youth flushed. This was a direct question that he could only answer in one way.

"How could I avoid liking you—very much?" he said.

"And yet you were so distant to me."

"It was not my intention to be so. Jim is more courteous than I am."

"So it seems," replied Ximena, drily; "he talks in his sleep of one Eveline. She is that schoolmaster's daughter, is she not?"

"She is."

"And does he like her very much?"

"They were excellent friends."

Ximena smiled.

"All the harder that he should be lying here, on account of me," she said.

"Is that your belief?" exclaimed the astonished Morse.

"Why should he be wounded for any other cause?" simply inquired the girl. "It was not a thief who did it, and therefore it must be a jealous admirer."

"I see," said Morse, a light breaking in upon him, "you suspect me?"

The look on the face of the girl sufficed for an answer. Morse dropped into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"Suspected of attempting to murder dear old Jim!" he moaned.

"You do not understand me," said Ximena, laying a hand upon his shoulder. "It was the doctor who said that no other could have done it, and then I thought, because I knew it, that you were very fond of me, and I have made so much of him, and it might have been done in a moment of passion. We Spaniards think nothing of *that*."

"I would rather have turned a weapon on myself," said Morse, looking up with the light of bitterness in his eyes. "His friendship is more to me than aught else in the world."

"Indeed," said Ximena, withdrawing her hand from his shoulder. "You English are a strange people."

"Pardon me, if I think you Spaniards are also peculiar," said Morse. "Surely it is early days for me to think of love and rivalry, and all that nonsense."

"Nonsense?"

"In my eyes, yes; boy-and-girl trifling. Ximena, I admired you from the moment we met, and I certainly thought of a time to come when I might be old enough to love you as a man, but I went no further than that."

"I have been unjust to you," said Ximena, bursting into tears. "Will you ever forgive me?"

Of course he would, and he went further, declaring that he had nothing to forgive; and then she dried her tears, and they sat down by the side of Jim together.

"It was the shock that made him insensible," said Ximena; "the doctor says so. Poor fellow! But he shall not die. We will nurse him together, and he will soon be well again. The doctor says he is very strong, and that is in his favour."

They were excellent friends now, she and Morse; for although it was a bitter experience for him to find that he had been suspected of being an assassin, he felt bound to make allowance for the different ways and thoughts of the Spaniards.

To them it was a perfectly natural thing that a jealous lover should use the knife upon his rival, if he got a good chance of doing it safely. And Ximena was Spanish to the backbone.

The doctor, who shortly after appeared, paid no apparent heed to the presence of Morse, but examined his patient and declared that he was no worse. He re-dressed the wound, and left some medicine which Jim was to take immediately after he regained consciousness.

"It may be required within an hour," he said.

Ximena followed him from the room with the object of putting Morse right in his eyes. He was not so easily convinced.

"Who, then, did it?" he asked.

"Will you do something for me?" asked Ximena.

"How can I refuse you?" said the doctor, his hard face relaxing into a smile.

"Do you know Miguel Navargez?"

"The officer—one of them, at least—of your father's yacht?"

"The same."

"I have seen him, and should know him again if we met."

"Will you find out if he is in Seville?"

"I will do my best," said the doctor. "And if he is?"

"Then it is to him we must look for the assassin," said Ximena.

"Ah! those eyes of yours, senorita," said the old man. "They are firebrands among the young senors. By this evening you shall know if Miguel Navargez is in Seville or not."

Then, pleading the cause of his other patients, he hurried away.

CHAPTER CCCXX.

MIGUEL NAVARGEZ ACCOUNTS FOR HIS TIME.



WITHIN the hour named by the doctor, Jim returned to consciousness. Morse was alone with him at the time, Ximena having left the room to pay one of her short visits to the Hidalgo.

It was now deemed imperative that the truth should be known to the old nobleman, and why it had hitherto been kept from him Morse could not tell.

If he had known that Ximena had been reserved on the matter for his sake, more than for the peace of her father, he would have felt flattered.

But Morse was not given to assumptions of that nature, and he remained in the dark.

Jim opened his eyes and looked about the room in dull astonishment, until seeing Morse, he asked, in a feeble voice, if he had been ill.

"Yes," replied Morse; "it came upon you last night. Can you remember nothing? But stay. This medicine is for you to take."

He poured it out, raised Jim's head upon his arm, and administered the medicine.

It had a reviving effect, and some of the lost colour came back to Jim's cheeks.

"What is the matter with my back?" he asked; "it feels mighty stiff."

"You were taken ill on the bridge by the castle gate," replied Morse. "Think now. Do you not remember?"

Jim lay thinking for a moment, and then recalled the events of the previous night.

"I was seated on the bridge," he said. "But while you were ringing the bell I got up to come to you. Then I suddenly felt as if a red-hot iron had pierced my back, and—that's all."

"You saw nobody?"

"No; but now you mention it, I did hear a shuffling footstep behind me, and—yes—there was somebody

skulking in those old buildings—stables, I should say they are, or have been. The fellow must have followed me up. They are deuced fond of the knife here."

"You were the first to enter the cell where the skeletons are," said Morse. "Of course this is a proof that there is something in the old legend."

"You think that there is an assassin kept to avenge the intrusion upon the skeletons? I am surprised at you Morse."

"It is a coincidence, anyway. But you must keep quiet, Jim. You are fearfully weak."

"Yes; I have what the Americans call 'a general sense of goneness' about me."

The arrival of the Hidalgo with Ximena cut short their talking. The old nobleman was much distressed, and he vowed that, if it lay in his power, he would bitterly avenge the cowardly attack.

"It was wrong of me to bring you to Seville," he said.

"I would come again if you honoured me with an invitation," replied Jim. "My chief regret is I shall be a burden to you."

Ximena would not permit him to talk any more. The Hidalgo stayed awhile, and then departed to pay a visit to the authorities and urge upon them the necessity of taking steps to discover the author of the attempted assassination.

But what interest the authorities might have taken in it was discounted by the son of the governor having been killed outright the night before.

Before noon the doctor was at the castle again, and expressed his satisfaction with the condition of his patient. There was but little fever, and although the wound was a serious one, it did not appear that the lungs were injured.

"Light food and quietude," he prescribed, "with such medicines as I may prescribe, given *unfailingly*. I do not give rose-coloured water, but curative things."

In the evening, Jim, when quietly sleeping, was left alone, with an attendant at the door outside to give warning of any sound he heard from the patient.

The table in the hall was spread as usual, and Morse, with the Hidalgo and Ximena, sat there.

It was a quieter meal than usual. The attendants talked at their end of the table in subdued tones, and drank less than was their custom. As the meal was drawing to a close there was a ringing at the gate, and presently the doctor was ushered in.

He was not alone. The young officer of the yacht, Miguel Navargez, was in his company. He carried himself proudly, as one who feels he is suffering under an unjust imputation.

"I have found him," said the doctor, quietly, "and it is for him to explain his movements yesterday."

"Navargez!" exclaimed the Hidalgo; "why is he brought here?"

"I am suspected of attempting to assassinate your guest," bitterly replied the young Spaniard. "What is he to me, that I should do this thing?"

"It was my suggestion," said Ximena, in a low tone.

"But why make it?" asked the Hidalgo.

"Navargez has made love to me," said Ximena. "He is jealous of all things, even a boy, whom he considers stands in his way."

"He is grossly impertinent," said the Hidalgo, with a darkening brow. "The daughter of the house of Toreomez is not for one of his class. Now, senor," to the young officer, "how comes it that you are at Seville?"

"I am here on a short visit to some relatives. I have seven days' leave from my superior officer."

"He was at a dance last night," said the doctor, "so he declares, and if it can be proved, we must look elsewhere."

"I can bring fifty witnesses!" said Navargez, hotly.

"Hidalgo, if you think me guilty——"

"I know nothing concerning your guilt or innocence," interposed the Hidalgo, coldly; "but as you have seemingly forgotten yourself, in what way I need not mention, you will consider yourself removed from the 'Toreo.'"

"It is unjust!" said Navargez, casting an angry glance at Ximena.

"You will receive three months' pay," continued the Hidalgo—"provided, of course, that you can account for your time last night."

"And if I cannot, does that prove that I am an assassin?" asked Navargez. "Hidalgo, you must be just."

"I have possession of the weapon used," remarked the doctor, casually. "It has your arms upon it, Hidalgo."

He produced it, in a leathern sheath, as he spoke, and handed it over to the Hidalgo.

"It is mine," said the old nobleman, after having examined it, "and was safe in the armoury three days ago."

"I have had no access to the place," said Navargez.

"No; and you are not charged with the crime. Go, and to-morrow call at the bank for your three months' pay."

"Am I still to be dismissed from your service, Hidalgo?"

"I have spoken. Go!"

Navargez, with a look at Ximena, insolent and threatening, which she responded to with a contemptuous smile, strode from the hall.

"He has everything in his favour," said the doctor. "He was at the dance, and he did not steal this poniard. But for all that, he is the author of the crime."

"You speak in enigmas," said the Hidalgo.

"He instigated it," replied the doctor, "and it is now my task to find the hireling."

"That I believe," said Morse, "to be next to the impossible."

"Not with our good doctor," said Ximena.

Up to that hour the Hidalgo had been unacquainted with the attempt to rob him made by Anselmo and his two confederates. A chance remark from Ximena led to it, and finally, at her instigation, Morse told the whole story.

"I trusted Anselmo," said the Hidalgo, "and he deserved his fate. For the rest of it, I hold myself more and more indebted to you and your friend. Nor shall the negro Romeo be forgotten."

The "negro Romeo," who had been forbidden to enter the chamber where Jim lay, was giving way to grief in the domestic quarters, varying his tears with threats of what he would do with the assassin when he got hold of him.

Summoned to appear before the Hidalgo, he received two assurances that somewhat comforted him.

One was that his beloved young master was undoubtedly progressing favourably, and the other that he had henceforth the goodwill of the Hidalgo, who sealed the promise by bestowing upon him a gold watch and diamond ring, the beauty of which fairly took Romeo's breath away.

He referred to the watch, in his anxiety to know the time, fully forty times ere he went to rest that night.

And it was, indeed, a watch to be proud of, for it was one of the famous repeaters of fifty years ago, and it kept infallible time.

His grandfather had a watch, one of the ancient silver turnips that went on its eccentric way, recording the hours anyhow and nohow. But the old nigger was proud of it.

And now the burning desire of Romeo was to return safely to the bosom of his family, and with his really beautiful watch put the silver turnip into a back seat for ever more.

CHAPTER CCCXXI

THE ASSASSIN FOUND.



THE name of the doctor was Paula, and he was rightly considered to be a clever man, not only in his profession, but in other ways.

Convinced as was that Navargez was the instigator of the attempted assassination, his first step on leaving

he castle that evening was to call upon one of his

patients who was slightly related to the dismissed officer of the "Toreo."

It was a woman, and in conversing with her he learnt that Miguel had stayed a day and night at her house, and that while there he had brought home a visitor with whom he was closeted for an hour or more.

This person was not introduced to the relative, as an ordinary member of society would have been, but came and went in secret.

Nevertheless, like a woman, the relative had been curious, and watching at a window, saw the visitor leave. She eventually described him.

The doctor smiled in a dry way. He had now obtained the clue he required, and, being tired out, retired to rest, assured that he had the tool of Navargez almost ready to his hand.

In the morning he was early at the castle, where he found Jim so much better that he authorised his removal to his bedroom.

"But let it be done with exceeding care," he said. "Anselmo should superintend it."

They told him Anselmo was gone, had mysteriously disappeared with two others, and had not since been seen or heard of.

This statement being made in the presence of Jim, he reflected on the advisability of confiding the facts of the attempted robbery, with its ensuing results, to the doctor.

But remembering that the Hidalgo had a strong objection to any of his affairs being public property, he preserved a discreet silence.

But Doctor Paula knew that Anselmo would not have left without some potent cause, and he sought audience with the Hidalgo, who confided the facts to him, as he had learnt them from Morse and Ximena.

"The money," he added, "I have had removed to my chamber. It was a great temptation to the man, but he paid dearly for yielding to it. I do not desire the story to become public gossip."

"Anselmo is not dead," said the doctor, decidedly.

"Eh? my friend?" ejaculated the Hidalgo; "you jest?"

"Indeed I do not," was the reply. "What if I bring him back to you?"

"I will assuredly punish him," was the answer, "in my own way."

"I will not bring him on those terms," said the doctor. "Other crimes may be laid to his charge. It will not be in your power to act alone."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this: he is the assassin who attempted to take your guest's life. I am sure of it."

"But why should he do so?"

"He was instigated by Navargez, and if I can bring him to his knees to make a confession, the leading villain will be punished after all."

"More and more I regret the coming of the changes of modern times," said the Hidalgo. "Say that I secure this Navargez, and have proof of his guilt, must his punishment rest with others?"

"He ought to be dealt with by the common law," replied the doctor.

"Let it be so," sighed the Hidalgo.

"Anselmo must have stolen the dagger he used," said the doctor, "on the night he went away, perhaps. But why he should hide away has yet to be explained. If he could escape by swimming to one bank, he could have reached the other. He might have returned hither, and laid all the burden of his crime of theft upon his confederates."

"Bring him here," said the Hidalgo, "and he shall speak the truth."

The doctor was thoroughly acquainted with Seville. In his earlier days he practised among the lower classes, and there were times, even now, when some wounded man, who had need of his care, and could pay for it, though he lived in the slums of the city, would send for him.

The doctor never asked his patients where they got the money to pay his fees. It was no concern of his.

No better man could have been found for hunting down a criminal in hiding, although he had rarely practised the art. But at times, when some more than usually atrocious criminal was wanted, he had given invaluable assistance to the police.

He could go here, there, and everywhere, and no man question his object. The natural assumption would be that he was visiting his patients.

And for the rest of the day he was seen wandering about the lowest quarter of Seville.

Anselmo, for a surety, had not taken to the open country. No wise criminal ever does that. The better chances of safe hiding are to be found in the great cities. It is only when the nervous rascal breaks cover that the officers of the law can take up a free scent, and go after him in full cry.

At last—it was just at nightfall—Doctor Paula stopped by a house in a dirty, narrow street, where the houses were massive, square, and high, relics of the Moorish occupation. A weird old woman was standing by the door, and she gave the doctor a courtesy, far more graceful than one would look for from a woman of her appearance.

"Many lodgers to-night, senora?" inquired the doctor.

"None, but one who has been with me these four days. The dog came to me dripping wet, with a slight wound in his chest, from some brawl. It was no case for you, doctor. I applied some of my own salve, and if it has not healed him, he makes no complaint."

"That salve of yours is a wonderful thing," said the doctor. "I have often wondered at its power. But I have never yet seen a wound closed by it. Is your lodger in?"

"He is. But he is not fond of society. He sits and growls all day, and at night goes about like a scavenger dog, to see what he can pick up for a living."

"If you told him that I wanted to examine him," said the doctor, suavely, he might comply with my request."

"The salve, doctor, is a simple one. My mother taught me to make it."

"The simplest medicines are the best, very often. Show me where this man is, and I will give you the price of six beds—a ducat. Perhaps I can persuade him where you would fail."

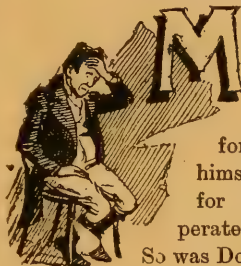
"The ducat, doctor," said the old woman, holding out her hand.

He placed the coin within it, and as she turned to lead the way, he muttered:

"Found!"

CHAPTER CCCXXII.

THE SHADOW ON MIGUEL NAVARGEZ.



MORE than the average amount of nerve was required for the errand the doctor was upon. Anselmo, having forfeited his position, and placed himself in peril of being punished for his crimes, might be desperate. He was certainly armed.

So was Doctor Paula.

Though he had little fear of the poorest and roughest man in the district, if he was recognised, there was still the chance of some desperado, ignorant of his personality, falling foul of him. The theory that the Spaniard must live, even at the expense of another's life, was very general.

The doctor had a small but exceedingly good revolver in his possession. He looked to it ere he got beyond the light of the doorway.

The old woman walked quietly, and escorted him through a dismal, dirty passage to the back of the house. Pausing by an open doorway that showed a portion of the ill-kept yard, she said:

"You will find him there. He sits and smokes most of the day under the verandah."

The doctor on emerging from the house saw the verandah, a broken-down bit of woodwork on the left. Beneath it sat Anselmo, upon a stool, his elbows resting on his knees.

To take him by surprise was the doctor's object,

and walking with scarce a sound, he was upon him, with his revolver hidden from view, but ready in his grasp.

"Anselmo!"

The man looked up, and his hand moved swiftly towards his sash in search of his knife.

But the revolver was out in a flash, and held in a line with his head.

"Give yourself up to me," said the doctor. "You will find I am more merciful than the gendarmes."

"What do you want, senor?" asked Anselmo. "I am not ill, but more than that—I am dead, and would be forgotten."

They were known to each other, having met many times in the castle and elsewhere. The doctor smiled.

"I am here," he said, "to bring you back to life—for a few brief hours, anyway."

"You speak in the mist," said Anselmo.

"I must know who set you on to murder the young Englishman," said Doctor Paula; "you had no grudge against him."

"Not much, perhaps," was the reply. "But I was helped at a time when I needed it, and shall I not give a man something in return?"

"Of your own, certainly, but not the life of another."

"By the saints, I had nothing to give."

"How were you helped?"

"I was drowning——"

"On that night you tried to rob the Hidalgo?"

"It was so. I was wounded, but not seriously. Nevertheless, it troubled me, and the current carried me down quickly, as helpless as a dog. He who saved me was by the castle on the south side, and he dragged me out."

"His name?"

"Must I speak it?"

"You must; or shall I name him? It was Miguel Navargez."

"As you know so much," said Anselmo, "there is nothing to conceal. But let me tell the whole truth. It was not for him alone I did this thing. As I floated down the river I saw the face of the Senor Gordon peering over the wall, and I knew that it was he who had foiled me in my purpose. I swore I would be avenged."

"Give me your knife," said the doctor, "and go on before me to my house."

Anselmo hesitated a moment, but a slight movement of the revolver roused him to action. He drew the knife from its sheath and handed it to the doctor.

"Go on," was the command he received.

Sullenly, and with his head bent down, Anselmo started on his way. There was no need to give him

directions, for he was well aware of the position of the doctor's house.

It was in one of the streets near the castle.

The doctor kept close behind him, ready to shoot the rascal down if he attempted to fly. But Anselmo had no such thought in his head.

The old woman had disappeared, and though when journeying through the narrow streets they met several men who glanced at them curiously, no interruption to their progress took place.

The doctor was a single man, with an old duenna for a housekeeper. It was his habit to go in and out without troubling her, and on arriving at his abode, a massive, time-worn building, he opened a small side-door with a key, and they were immediately in his surgery.

A lamp already lighted revealed the odd collection of strangely-shaped bottles, and the usual paraphernalia of a man who is a medical practitioner and a student of chemistry to boot.

"Sit there," said the doctor, pointing towards a chair by a table. Anselmo sat down.

"Here are writing materials," said the doctor, placing them before him. "Write a full confession, and I will witness it."

"And when I have done so?" asked Anselmo.

"You will have a hundred ducats and twenty-four hours' grace to get away. A life among the brigands of Savarra will be congenial to you, I do not doubt."

Anselmo bit his lips. He felt very much at a disadvantage in the presence of the doctor, who seemed to be able to read his very thoughts.

He was meditating joining the brigands that very evening, when the old man arrived and found him so deeply wrapt in thought.

"I will write exactly as you wish," he said, "because I must."

He was a good penman, having been fairly well educated, from a Spanish point of view, as one of the people. In a quarter of an hour he had written a terse but very clear confession of his crime. The doctor read it through and declared that it sufficed.

Unlocking a drawer, he brought out a small bag of money, and counted out the promised sum.

"You have till the morrow at sunset," he said, "to make your preparations for going away. It is probable you may have some friends you wish to bid adieu. Away with you."

"Till to-morrow eve," murmured Anselmo.

"It is more grace than I originally designed for you," said the doctor; "but I thought it probable that you might wish to have a companion to go with you—your confederate in crime."

"I may see him once again," muttered Anselmo, as he opened the door. "He has brought me to this pass, and I will be his shadow."

CHAPTER CCCXXIII.

THE DOG AGAIN EATS DOG.



JIM was progressing rapidly. In the morning, after a very peaceful night in his own chamber, whither he had been conveyed, he was much better. Morse, who was early at his bedside, was delighted to see the change in him.

"You will soon be yourself again, Jim," he said.

"I hope so," was the cheerful response. "It would have been hard luck, after all I have gone through, to die from a dig in the back."

"It is a dig that will cost somebody dear," said Morse.

Doctor Paula did not arrive until ten o'clock to see his patient. He had been making inquiries concerning the whereabouts of Miguel Navargez, and learnt that he had only the night before left his somewhat obscure lodging, and taken up his abode publicly in one of the best hotels.

Having attended to Jim, the doctor asked to see the Hidalgo and Ximena, to whom he explained the whole circumstances of the survival of Anselmo, and the way the attempted assassination came about. It was already pretty clear to them, but the confession of Anselmo settled all doubts.

But none of them were prepared for an exceedingly bold move on the part of Navargez. He had made up his mind to call upon the Hidalgo, and a servant announced that he had arrived at the castle while the trio were still together.

"If your excellency cannot see him now," said the man, "Senor Navargez craves the boon of an early appointment."

The Hidalgo looked at the doctor, who without any hesitation said:

"See him now, Hidalgo. The Senorita Ximena ought not, however, to be present."

The message was sent to the young officer that the Hidalgo would see him. The man was instructed to make no reference to the doctor's being present.

Ximena had no desire to remain, and left the room by another door.

After an interval of a few minutes Navargez was announced, and he came in with the respectful assurance of one who believed he would receive a courteous welcome from a superior.

He seemed surprised to find the doctor present, and ventured upon a remark that was another piece of unbounded assurance.

"I trust your excellency," he said, "is not in need of the care of the worthy doctor I see here?"

"Doctor Paula," replied the Hidalgo, coldly, "will explain the reason for his being present."

"Hearing your name announced," said the doctor, fixing his keen eye on the young man, "it occurred to me that a full confession, written by Anselmo, might interest you."

"Anselmo is a born liar!" said Navargez, hotly.

"How can you tell before you have heard what his confession relates to?"

Navargez hung his head. The question was a poser.

"Shall I read it to you?" asked the doctor. "It relates to the assassination—the attempted assassination—of the Hidalgo's guest, the Senor Gordon."

"Am I to understand," said Navargez, in a low tone, "that you believe the confession of Anselmo?"

"Fully," said the Hidalgo.

"Then it only remains for me to prove my innocence in a court of law?" queried Navargez, drawing himself up and breathing quickly.

"You can have twenty-four hours' grace," said the doctor. "I speak your wishes in this matter, Hidalgo, I believe?"

A bow signified an assent.

"Twenty-four hours' grace," pursued the doctor, "and then, if you are heard of again in Spain, you will be prosecuted."

It was plainly indicated by the face of the wretched young man that his high hope of the morning—the chief hope of his life, that he would be declared innocent—was dashed to the ground. Utter despair was betrayed in his wandering eyes and bloodless lips.

"Out of Spain," he said, "or free from her service I have nothing to live for."

"That is your concern," replied the Hidalgo. "It is nothing to me."

"You had better depart without further controversy," advised the doctor. "And please do not put your hand nearer to your pocket, or I shall think it advisable to shoot you as you stand."

The doctor's revolver was pointed towards him. Navargez saw that the murderous intention which arose in his mind had been divined and frustrated.

He turned towards the door, strode across the room, and vanished without another word.

But he was not allowed to do violence to anyone ere he left. Here again the doctor showed how shrewdly he divined the motives of a desperate man, by following him closely, still with the revolver ready for action.

Navargez, left to himself, would have sought Jim or Ximena and slain one, or both, if he had obtained the chance of doing so.

"Straight out from the castle!" was the command

of the doctor, and sullenly the defeated young man obeyed him.

He passed out by the gate that led to the river and sprang into a boat, by which he had arrived. The man in charge of it asked him where next.

"To the other side of the river," was the answer.

He was landed there, and throwing a few coins to the owner of the boat, he hastened away to the house where Anselmo had been staying, hoping to find him still there.

Failing all others, he would have his revenge upon him. After that, he cared not what happened.

Unfortunately for Anselmo, he was still there, waiting for the return of night to steal away.

On leaving the doctor the night before, he returned to his lodgings, and there solaced himself with some wine, afterwards falling into a drunken sleep, in which he still was when Navargez arrived.

The old woman of the house was about, and knowing that Navargez was no stranger to Anselmo, made no objection to his going to the chamber of the sleeping man.

"But I warn you, senor," she said, "that he has a devil on his back, and is hard ridden in his temper."

Navargez made no reply, but walking on down the passage, entered the chamber, a dirty hole of a place that was hardly fit for a dog.

Anselmo's bed was a mere pallet with a few rags on it. He was lying huddled up, snoring prodigiously.

As he lay, with his arms folded across his breast, stabbing him quietly, as Navargez now meditated doing, could not be done with fatal effect. His arms must be unfolded and put aside.

As Navargez essayed to do this quietly, Anselmo awoke and leaped up.

He saw and recognised his visitor.

In a flash his knife was out, and Navargez had a dagger ready. They closed in mortal struggle.

Not a word was said.

Each man knew that it was his life or that of his antagonist which would have to be forfeited.

But there were no violent movements or sounds that would have warned the people of the house of what was going on.

Each clasping the wrist of the hand that held the other's knife, they put all their strength into the effort to force down their own weapon so as to deal an effective blow.

Their feet shifted occasionally, but it was with a short, quick, strong step, as if they merely moved them to plant them still firmer. Their bodies slowly swayed to and fro, and their eyes were fixed upon each other with a glare that was burning with hatred.

No reproaches were necessary. They would have been a waste of words, and, what was more serious, a waste of breath.

Thus, hand to hand and foot to foot, they struggled.

Suddenly, with a wrench, Navargez got his hand free. A cry of exultation burst from his lips. But almost instantaneously Anselmo released his own.

A second grasp was not to be hoped for, and in a fury they set to hacking each other, utterly regardless of all things save the determination to kill. They did not at first feel the wounds they received, but hacked and hewed fiercely, while the blood poured from the gaping wounds inflicted by both.

The noise created by the desperate struggle could not now fail to be heard, and there were sounds of voices and feet all over the house.

"A fight somewhere!" was the cry. "Where is it?"

The scene of the struggle was quickly located, and then there poured into the room a dozen men and women mixed, the weird old landlady foremost, just in time to see both men fall to the ground.

Exhaustion from loss of blood had come over them. Life was ebbing fast from half a score wide wounds.

No earthly power could save them.

"Curse you!" cried the old hostess, fiercely, "could you not settle your beggarly quarrels elsewhere?"

And those were the last words heard by Navargez.

No priestly consolation, no wail of mourning friends, no blessing from the lips of loved ones cheered his last moments.

Like a hated dog he died.

And Anselmo fared no better.

He survived his companion in crime but a few moments, and the last thing his dimming eyes looked upon was a clenched fist, shaken by the furious hag, who cared not for his death, but only thought of the trouble and bother it might bring upon her.

So they died—the youth of promise and the trusted servant, both having left the beaten track of rectitude and honour, to find their reward in an incomparably miserable end.

CHAPTER CCCXXIV.

THE BULL-FIGHT.



THE mere killing of a man in the lower quarter of some of the towns or cities of Spain does not count for much.

This is natural enough in a country where the blood has always run hot and strong in the veins of its people.

We cannot judge the warm Southern nations by the phlegmatic bearing of people of a colder clime.

An ordinary man, and a stranger, well dressed, but with nothing about him to lead to his identity, had quarrelled, fought, and died with a ruffian in a common lodging-house. That was all.

There was a talk about it for an hour or two, the police made a record of it, and warned the old woman who kept the house to look more to the peace of it in the future. There the matter ended.

Whether the relatives of Navarrez so much as heard of the affair, is doubtful. If they did, they ignored it, not feeling desirous, perhaps, of having the expense of a funeral put upon them.

Dr. Paula heard of it—he heard of everything, from one or the other of his patients—but he never referred to the matter at the castle, where it did not seem to be known of by the humblest, or its owner or his friends.

“Let the whole thing be forgotten now,” he thought. “Better for all.”

So a week passed by, and by that time Jim was able to get out and walk a little. He would have walked more but for the doctor’s advice, as he was certain that he was almost as strong as ever.

“You may think so,” said Dr. Paula, “but you are not. See, now. You may walk smoothly for a while, and all is well, like the work of one who uses the plane on a plank with care. Then he thinks he will hurry, and pushes on. But poof! he comes to a knot. There is a pulling up with a jerk—the tool is injured, and he will work no more that day. Go easy, my young friend.”

So Jim went on ahead easy, and it was the better thing to do.

Meanwhile, the bull-fight, which ought to have taken place the week before, had been postponed.

Why, nobody knew, but some said it was because Despartola would have it so.

Perhaps, if Despartola’s mind had been fully known, the fault would have been laid on Jim, who was really in a sense the cause of it. The matador really desired his young second in the duel to witness his prowess in the arena, and knowing the impossibility of his attending for a time, gladly found an excuse in the bulls provided.

“I came here,” he said to the managers of the arena, “to fight *bulls*, not sheep.”

This contemptuous reference to the disposition of the animals provided sufficed. If Despartola said they were like sheep, it would never do to put them in the ring. The audience would hoot and howl them out again.

The fight would be a voted a farce.

There were many callers at the castle to inquire after Jim, among whom were the matador, the Duke of Valladolid and the Hidalgo Caridad; but as the latter were not as yet on visiting terms with the

Hidalgo Toreomez, they did not ask to see the patient until they were assured he was in a condition to receive visitors.

But as their names had already been made known, and the story of the duel had reached the ears of the Hidalgo, they were eventually received by the Hidalgo with due honour. The matador was too prudent to do more than call, make inquiries, and at last, at Jim’s request, see him privately.

The old Hidalgo did not approve of one of the proud race of the Valladolids fighting a matador, but it seemed that the duke had come out of the affair in a very satisfactory manner, and therefore was entitled to forgiveness.

Ximena was of course no stranger to the visitors having met them abroad, and their admiration, a thing of some weeks’ standing, was increased by a closer communion with her.

Their attentions to her were very marked; but Jim was not at all jealous. He took the sensible view of the matter. He was but a boy, after all, and in a week or two would go away, probably never to see her again.

Morse did not seem to care much for the duke or his friend, and they in turn were merely polite to him. Ximena was glad, as most young people are, of a change of company; but there was nothing marked in her attentions to either of the guests.

At length the day of the bull-fight was decided on and announced. Then all Seville went mad with expectation.

Rumours of the fiercest bulls, obtained to oblige Despartola, were abroad. He was expected to excel himself on this occasion.

Then arose another rumour, which proved, unlike many rumours, to be founded on fact. Despartola had a rival who had offered to meet any bull in the arena.

His name was said to be Aranju, and, in common with the majority of the bull-fighting class, of course he was one of the lower orders.

It was even said that he was a notorious brigand, who, having been sentenced to the galleys for life, had offered himself, a totally inexperienced man, to the arena as a probable, and therefore sensational, sacrifice to the national sport.

His death would not mar the entertainment. If one matador or a picador or a chulo, is slain, it is nothing. The sport goes on, for there are others to take his place.

The matador is the chief, the picadors ride the wretched horses sent into the arena to be sacrificed, and the chulos are on foot.

From the hands of the latter come the irritating darts, used to torture and exasperate a laggard bull. The picadors are attired as the Hidalgos’ retainers were, in ancient garb, and carry lances like the knights of old.

The especial box of the Hidalgo, who retained one year in and year out, as our own rich people do at the opera, was right opposite the entrance to the arena, and from it all the points of the encounter could be seen.

Almost at the last moment, the Hidalgo declared his intention of going, and he invited the duke and his friend to share his box with him and his guests. The invitation was accepted.

"I think I would rather be away," said Morse to Jim as they were sauntering in the courtyard that evening.

"It will be an experience," asserted Jim. "You must come."

"I will let you know what I will do, to-morrow," said Morse.

The morrow was the day of the bull-fight, and all in the castle, save himself, had fully decided on going. Even Romeo would be there, but not among the people. Despartola, as a compliment to him, the servant of Jim, had given him an invitation to be behind the scenes. He would be in the waiting chambers of the actors in the dangerous drama, and view the scene in the arena from behind the bars of the entrance gate.

CHAPTER CCCXXV.

THE MASKED MATADOR.



MORE rumours of an exciting nature were afloat on the following morning, and among them was the startling one that the aspiring matador would be masked.

That made his identity a subject for still keener discussion.

The question was: "Would a criminal be allowed to hide his face from the people?"

The general answer to the query was: "Assuredly not."

But then nobody knew anything about it, for in all the records of bull-fighting, no such thing as a condemned culprit being allowed to participate in the sport had ever been heard or read of.

Surely the day was filled with promise that the lovers of bloodshed and mystery would have a full return for their money.

At noon a carriage conveyed the Hidalgo and his guests to the arena. Morse had finally made up his mind to be there. He was impelled to see what there was in the sport to excite the undoubted enthusiasm of Ximena.

Only that morning at breakfast she had declared it

to be her conviction that a matador was the bravest of men. And it was not the first time she had uttered the sentiment.

"Why should the poorest born," she asked, "monopolise the honourable calling that has taken the place vacated by the death of chivalry in Spain?"

The Duke and the Hidalgo Caridad were there, and the former smiled as he asked what lady in Spain would marry a matador?

"If of noble blood, why not?" asked Ximena, and Morse felt rather angry with her.

But then, as he said to Jim, it was nothing to him if she *did* marry a matador. It was for the Hidalgo, her father, to speak out upon the subject, and he had not a word to say upon it.

Probably he thought it a very remote contingency, his daughter, the most beautiful girl in Seville, marrying a matador.

A disappointment awaited them at the arena. The Hidalgo, who had been invited with his friend, was there, but the duke was not. "He had been called away on important business," said the Hidalgo Caridad.

"I am glad I came," whispered Morse to Ximena.

"Of course," she replied; "how could you dream of staying away?"

"I thought very seriously of doing so," rejoined Morse.

"Ah!" drily returned Ximena; "you do not like the duke."

"I don't," answered Morse, in his most emphatic manner.

They were in their seats now, watching the people pouring in to take their places. It seemed as if all Seville would be there to witness the fight between man and beast.

Fronting them was the entrance of the men, and on each side of it the dens with the fiery bulls behind the barred gates, each in a separate place of confinement.

"The fiercest bulls are on our left," explained Ximena. "Those on the right will be let in first. They all come from Jarama, where the best bulls in Spain are bred. They are better than those bred at Utrera for Madrid."

In an astonishingly small space of time the public portion of the arena was packed, every seat taken, and not even standing room remained unoccupied.

Whether a bull-fight is right or wrong, there is no doubt that the sight seen by Jim as he glanced around was sufficient to set the blood tingling with a strange, fierce excitement.

No music was needed to rouse the spectators to expectancy. And there was none, unless the trumpets that heralded the opening of the exhibition come under that title.

The gate was thrown open, and the picadors came riding in on their sorry steeds, each a veritable Rosinante; but so gay with trappings that one scarce thought of their being so well qualified for the knacker.

Then came the chulos on foot, waving their short red cloaks, and holding aloft a bundle of darts.

Last of all came Despartola, to be received with a wild ovation. He stepped into the middle of the arena and held up his hand for silence.

The cheers were quickly hushed, and every ear stretched to catch the sound of his voice, for they could tell from his manner that he was about to speak.

"Your excellencies, my lord dukes and senors," he said in a voice that was heard by all, "it has pleased one Aranjú to come forward with the promise that whatsoever I may do, he will repeat. He makes but one stipulation, and that is, he is to wear a mask, which is not to be removed, even if he should be slain. If the bull kills him, he desires that he may be carried away and buried, even as an ordinary chulo would be in such a case, without the benefit of priestly consolation. His name, his identity, he earnestly desires to be kept concealed."

"Who is the man?" roared out a thousand voices. Silence being restored again, Despartola answered: "Senors, I know not. Here is here, attired as I am, but with his face hidden. He is no more of a stranger to you than he is to me; but seeing that he has the temerity to put himself forward as my equal, let the consequences be upon his own head."

"So let it be," cried the audience.

Despartola turned towards the gate and beckoned with his hand.

Then there stepped out a slim and youthful form, attired as a matador.

Over his head he wore a mask, united with a cap, that not only concealed his face, but his hair also.

His identity was so far perfectly concealed.

At first he was received in silence, but in a moment or two the rattling of fans was heard. The women, forming more than a third of the assembly, approved of the stranger, and thus expressed it.

It was the leading up to applause.

Spain is gallant, or nothing. The women led the way, and the men had to follow. Almost as with one voice, a hoarse cry burst from every man's throat, and it was repeated again and again as he slowly backed, bowing, from the arena.

Despartola smiled as he too retired, leaving the picadors and chulos in the arena to go through the first act of the bull-fight.

"See there," cried Ximena, pointed down towards the horsemen—"a black picador."

Jim had his field-glasses with him. He hastily

turned them towards the picador she pointed out. An exclamation of vexation escaped his lips.

"What is the matter?" asked Morse.

"It is Romeo," replied Jim, "the mad fool!"

CHAPTER CCCXXVI.

CERTAIN PERFORMERS DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES.



ROMEO indeed it was. Ever of an aspiring nature, he had pressed Despartola to allow him to go into the ring, declaring, in answer to a question, that his father and grandfather had distinguished themselves as matadors in Mexico, and that he had shone a bit in that direction.

And there he was, without the slightest knowledge of the work, and all his energies concentrated on keeping in the saddle.

"He can't even ride," said Jim, heartily angry with his follower. "I wonder if anything could be done to get the idiot out of the ring."

"It is but a negro," said Ximena.

"True," replied Jim; "but a faithful, good fellow, and I would not have anything happen to him for the world."

"What a strange people you are!" said Ximena, shrugging her shoulders. "I've heard that negroes have no souls."

"It is sufficient for me to think of his poor body. Can't he be got out?"

"Too late!" said Morse; "the first den is open."

The iron gate in front of the first bull was gliding up, and the beast with a snort came bounding out.

The chulos withdrew on one side, leaving the picadors full in view of the angry beast.

Angry with its day and night confinement; angry with man that he should bring a beast away from the green fields to be stared at by all these people; furious with the instinctive knowledge that it was in presence of an enemy it would have to fight.

Then, as such creatures of its blood and breed invariably do, it singled out a picador, and went for him.

That picador happened to be Romeo.

He was mounted upon the very worst of all the miserable horses, his Spanish brother picadors having taken care it should be so, and it was no more calculated to get out of the way of the rushing bull than a wooden horse without wheels would have been.

With bent head the angry animal charged, thrust its horns into the defenceless side of the wretched horse, and bowled it over.

Romeo was thrown a purler, but what would have stunned an ordinary white man did him little or no harm.

He was upon his feet, and tearing away round the arena, ere the chulos could come to his aid.

Such unlooked-for activity upset the usual arrangements of the bull-fight.

By rights Romeo ought to have lain still, and waited while the chulos with their coloured scarves worried the bull and distracted its attention.

Cumbered as the picador is with pads that would stop most cricketers from running at all, he seldom attempts to do anything but keep still, after he is down. But Romeo made light of his burden, and ran in a fashion that would have astonished some people who are authorities on public sport.

And worse than all, the bull went after him, ignoring the waving scarves and the shouts of the chulos.

The people yelled, and the cries were deafening.

"Bravo, picador! At him, toro!" resounded on all sides.

Romeo, deaf to all the noise, blind to everything but the necessity of getting away from his horned enemy, ran round the ring until he came to and bolted into the den from whence the bull had recently emerged.

The beast jibbed at that, pulling up short and peering curiously into the gloom, then took to snorting, and pawing at the sand of the arena, in angry defiance and in a challenging spirit.

It was an invitation to Romeo to come out and fight fair in the open, an invitation he prudently declined.

Then somebody who worked the machinery in the rear must have received orders to drop the barred gate, for down it came with a run, and Romeo, though a prisoner until the sports were over, was safe.

He came forward, and peered between the bars, utterly indifferent to the shouts of derision he was greeted with.

The bull, with its tail swaying to and fro, walked into the middle of the ring, there to be hailed with delighted cries of "Bravo, toro!" which apparently afforded him vast satisfaction.

But it was short lived, for the active chulos, with their darts, were speedily upon him. The neck is the spot usually selected to plant them in, and he was speedily adorned with half a dozen, sticking out in various directions, and the ribbons attached thereto streaming out behind.

Irritated by the pain inflicted, he careered round the ring, occasionally charging a chulo, who leaped nimbly over the barrier. A false step would have meant death for the man.

When this sort of fun had lasted about ten minutes

Despartola entered, and coolly facing the bull, waved a short red cloak he held in his left hand. The beast seeing it, made straight for him.

Treating the animal as an inferior antagonist, Despartola carelessly thrust the sword he carried in his right hand, between the shoulders, and toro was no more.

Pierced through the spine, he fell and lay still in death.

Then arrived some men into the ring with a horse and the dragging apparatus to take away the slaughtered creature. Despartola retired amid the plaudits of the audience.

The horse that the caged Romeo had ridden was also dragged away, not yet dead, but moaning piteously. It was a sight to move any man but a Spaniard at a bull-fight. But, then, it was a portion of the show.

"Now we shall see the masked matador," said Ximena to Morse, to whom the spectacle was not exactly edifying. But the low-comedy element was not wanting in Romeo, who was seen at the bars of his prison gesticulating to be let out.

Some order must have been given concerning him, for a picador was seen to go up to his cage, and by his movements reveal the fact that the captive negro was to remain there in safety during the rest of the exhibition.

Romeo shook his fist at the man, an act that excited the lookers-on to roars of laughter.

"He is better there," said Jim, "and serve him right for being such a fool."

So Romeo was left to make the best he could of the situation.

And now another bull was admitted into the ring, and the early part of the previous performance was repeated. Then came the masked matador to do his share of the work.

He did it with an ease and grace that roused the assembly to a high pitch of enthusiasm.

But there were not wanting many keen judges of the throng who saw that it was more a matter of nerves than experience.

He had the whole thing in theory but not in practice, and they said among themselves, "Wait until he meets with a better bull, then Despartola will show him who is the master matador."

The Hidalgo Toreomez was among the number entertaining this opinion. Ximena and the Hidalgo Caridad had suddenly become very quiet.

In turn each of the bulls on one side of the entrance was killed, with but little variation in the method of procedure. About a dozen horses were slain, and a chulo had a narrow escape.

A bull caught him on his horns as he leapt the barrier, assisting his progress over with considerable

violence; but the man was not seriously hurt, for a moment later he was astride the top of the barrier, smiling and bowing to the cheering people.

A few minutes' lull ensued, a brief rest between the two portions of the play. It was made tolerant to the eager spectators by the sight of Romeo, still indignantly expostulating behind the bars. For him there was unmerciful chaffing, happily, in a language he very imperfectly understood.

Then there was another blowing of trumpets, and the first of the better bulls was let loose.

It was a small, active creature, with eyes that flashed in the strong light like small mirrors, as he turned this way and that, waiting for his foes.

Once more the picadors rode in, and in a trice three helpless horses were down, and their riders saved by the watchful chulos.

Fire shot from the eyes of the bull as the picadors were dragged out of his reach, pulled this way and that, as the angry beast dashed forward with its head down, blindly going straight on until it discovered that its intended victim had escaped.

Wheeling round, it made another dash at the picador who was being borne away, only to be lured out of the track by the scarlet flag flashed before its eyes by the lively chulos.

The picadors, encumbered by the padding, were rather humorous in appearance, and the expression on their faces, as they were hoisted over the barricade, betrayed the fact that they were uncommonly glad to get out of peril.

In any country where the sense of humour is at all strong, the rescue of these supernumeraries would have been hailed with laughter, but it was not so in Spain, least of all in Seville.

The audience had assembled to witness tragedy, not comedy. There was but little laughter in the minds of any of all the host. The lust of blood was raging in their breasts.

After several picadors had fallen and been rescued, there happened one of the hoped-for tragedies.

The poor horses that fell, cruelly maltreated by the bull, were nothing in the eyes of the Spaniards. They were mere cattle, and what did it matter how they were slain, or how they suffered, or the time occupied in their dying?

It was a *man* they wished to see come to grief; for, strange to say, the sympathies of the vast majority of the audience were, at this stage of the fight, on the side of the bull.

When the bull gored a helpless horse, they yelled "Bravo, Toro!" as if it were doing some noble deed. When it dashed at the retreating chulos and picadors they encouraged it with fierce cries, and by-and-by, as we have said, the longed-for catastrophe came.

A horse was thrown, and the picador riding it fell so

that one of his legs was under the animal. The chulos were so long dragging him free that the bull was able to gore the horse and then turn its attention to the rider as he was being lifted from the ground.

There was no time to wave the alluring flag, and the chulos, with keen regard for their own safety, dropped the hapless picador and scattered right and left.

The angry beast, with one dive of its head and upward movement with its horns ripped away the padding of one of the man's legs and inflicted a deep and ghastly wound in his thigh.

Cheers for "Toro" rent the air. The men yelled, the women waved their handkerchiefs and flashed their fans. Here was a bull, indeed! a hero of the bovine species, and they cheered the bull so that their voices were as the turmoil of a tremendous storm.

Toro was astonished at the demonstration. It was something unexpected, and its attention was diverted from the fallen man.

With raised head, it showed its wondering eyes to the enthusiastic audience, and that was the chance for the chulos to act again.

One of the boldest ran past the bull waving his flag, and the animal, with renewed fury, sped after him. Then the rest of the chulos rushed in and picked up the prostrate picador.

His eyes were closed, and the pallor of his cheeks was ghastly. As they bore him away, a track of blood marked their course. He was already as good as a dead man, for the horns of the bull had rent open an artery, and the tourniquet of the surgeon not being available in the arena, he was doomed to die.

But that was not known to, or, indeed, cared about by the audience. The man was a nobody, a mere piece of human padding in the show, and Toro had given them a specimen of bovine fire and spirit. So they cheered and cheered as the dying man was taken away, and the chulos, like so many butterflies, returned to flit about the arena.

No darts were needed to rouse the beast, but three were thrust into his shining neck, driving the bull to a pitch of madness.

The sand flew into the air from his feet as the fiery toro ran this way and that. The chulos one by one disappeared, and toro was left alone in the arena.

Seeing this, he stopped short, and presently espied the calm Despartola approaching with cloak and sword.

An angry bellow came from the deep throat, and the impetuous charge followed.



CHAPTER CCCXXVII.

THE RESULT OF THE RIVALRY.



THE Matador awaited the rush, cool and confident. To the amazement of the spectators, he cast aside his cloak and stood practically offering himself as a target for those cruel horns.

His sword lightly played in the sunlight, and he

made no effort to point it towards the bull, but as the beast came up to him with the dash of a steam-engine he dexterously planted one foot between the horns and leaped clean over the back.

It was a task that had to be performed in the fraction of a second. The feat had been attempted before, sometimes with success, but as often to end in the fall of the matador.

Once down upon the sand, no mortal could aid him. The chulos would be out of the ring, and the bull, quickly turning, would be upon him with his lowered head and unfailing horns to gore him to death in a few seconds.

But Despartola had succeeded with a grace that was unparalleled. He alighted upon his feet, met the second rush with the point of his sword between the shoulders, and wild *toro* was done for.

He tumbled over on his side, shivered, and lay still. There was perfect uproar at the termination of this scene. The men roared, the women shrieked with delight. Fans were broken by the vigour with which they were shaken in approval.

Despartola retired, only to be recalled to receive another ovation, and the second fierce bull was in the ring ere the tumult of delight had subsided.

"It is the masked matador's turn now," said many, and their experienced eyes showed them that the unknown one would have to meet a bull even fiercer than the one which had recently been taken away dead.

All was hurry, bustle, and excitement now. The picadors were only too glad to get over their part, and two slain horses with the accompanying rescues, sufficed for them.

The chulos planted the same number of darts as the last bull had received, and cleared away over the barrier. *Toro* held the arena for a spell, and utilised the time by capering about and snorting defiance.

A dreadful hush fell upon the people, as if about to witness a tragedy. It was broken by the shriek of a woman.

One with a heart worthy of her sex had yielded to the better feeling, and uttered a cry of pity.

It was Ximena, and she had fainted.

There were some expressions of contempt from the more hardened of her sex, as Jim and Morse helped the Hidalgo to carry her from the box to the secluded passage outside.

None of them witnessed what followed.

The Hidalgo Caridad remained, shifting uneasily about until the gate was thrown open and the masked matador appeared. Then he became as one frozen, and looked on with eyes he could not shift for a moment from the thrilling scene.

As Despartola had done, the masked matador threw aside his cloak and awaited the inevitable rush.

It came as the wind sweeps down upon a motionless tree.

There was a foot planted between the horns, and then, alas! a hesitation the eye could hardly see, and too short to take place in the ordinary records of time.

But, for all that, it was too long.

The hapless man was seen to turn in the air and fall upon his back with a thud that was heard by all the breathless watchers of the spectacle.

Toro heard it, too, and wheeled about. A roar of triumph burst from the foam-flecked lips. Then his hoofs beat up the sand as he bore down upon its victim.

The sharp-pointed horns were thrust into the side of the man, and a wild cry, not of horror, but of fierce approval, born of a lust for blood, burst from the encircling throng.

The startled chulos, who had been peering over the barrier, sprang upon it, impelled for the moment to go to the aid of the doomed man. But they went no further. *Toro* was the victor. For him were the spoils of revenge.

Thrice he gored his victim, then knelt upon the lifeless body, kneading him with his knees, until instinctively assured that there was no more to be done.

Rising, the beast bellowed its note of victory, and then, as one weary with the fray, trotted back to its den, opened to receive the victor.

There was other bull-fighting to be done, for the people had paid their money and must have its full worth, but the Hidalgo Caridad wanted to see no more.

And yet he could not go until the dead man had been borne away.

He knew it would be done without any show of reverence, for having died without benefit of priest, the dead matador would be buried with the scant ceremony, if the laws of the bull-fight were carried out, shown to the slaughtered beasts.

The chulos, with some assistants, brought in a

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Romeo, deaf to all the noise, blind to everything but the necessity of getting away from his horned enemy, ran round the ring until he came to the den.

hurdle, to which were attached dragging-ropes, and the huddled-up form disappeared from the eyes of the gathering.

Then the Hidalgo Caridad staggered, rather than walked, out of the box, to find that the Hidalgo Toreomez and his daughter and guests were gone.

The corridor, a stone passage in which the dismayed man was, held no tenant but himself, and sitting down upon a bench, he covered his face with his hands. Presently the hot tears streamed between his fingers.

And no marvel, for the slain matador was his boon companion, the warmest friend he had ever possessed, the Duke of Valladolid.

What had possessed him to enter upon a rivalry with Despartola the world would never know. For those who knew the dead man there was nothing but surmises which would be more or less correct.

Some would say that he was not satisfied that the world would believe Despartola's version of the duel, but would declare it to have been a bogus affair, arranged to unduly inflate the reputation of the young duke.

Others would say that he had essayed to win the heart of Ximena, for whom he at least avowed a strong liking, by displaying his courage in the ring with the bull.

But let them say what they might, they would never know for certain how it all came about.

The duke carried the full secret of his conception with him to the grave.

And it was to be the grave of a dishonoured, un-blessed matador!

No wonder his friend, the Hidalgo Caridad, wept.

He brushed away his tears, and left the building. Outside, he halted for a moment, and then went round to the entrance used by the actors in the hideous blood-stained drama.

A woman was there beating at the door with her small brown hands. Beside her stood two terrified children.

"What is the matter, my poor woman?" asked Caridad.

"My husband—my husband!" replied the woman. "The picador who was gored in this accursed fight."

"Do not make a disturbance," urged Caridad; "perhaps he has been well cared for."

"Who cares for a picador, but those who love him?" demanded the woman, raising her tearless, wild eyes to his. "See here—these children must have bread, and it is scarce in Seville, save for those who live in idleness, as you do."

"My good woman," said Caridad, "you are led away by your sorrow to say angry and unjust things. I cannot mourn your husband as you do, but I regret his death—if, indeed, he is dead. I, too, have suffered the loss of one I love. Let us go in together."

He beat upon the door with the handle of a dagger he carried in his belt, and after a short delay it was thrown open by an angry chulo.

"What means this rioting here?" he demanded, at first seeing only the woman and the children.

"My husband!" cried the woman—"my husband!"

"So you are the wife of Eric," said the chulo. "He was such a fool that he had not learnt to fall from his horse. He had no business in the ring."

"Peace, man," said Caridad, sternly, as he advanced a pace or two. "Give the woman words of comfort not abuse of her husband."

The chulo saw that he had a nobleman to deal with now, and sank down to the lowest depths of humility.

"Your grace must pardon our rough ways," he said.

"The life is hard, and we have no time to speak soft words. If I had been slain to-day, who would have cared?"

"Then the poor fellow is dead?"

"It is so. He called out once for his wife and children ere he expired. He is gone, and lies in the outer house for the dead."

"I know the way there," said the woman, bitterly; "may I go in?"

The chulo signed for her to pass on, and she hastened in with her two children, both of whom were crying bitterly.

"Your grace," said the chulo, "wishes to see someone?"

"Despartola," replied Caridad, briefly.

"You will not tell him I was curt to the woman, for our life is hard. We get no sympathy, and rarely show it. Despartola, for a matador, is tender-hearted."

"I will say nothing," answered Caridad. "Bid Despartola come here to me, or lead me to him."

"I will bring him hither," said the chulo, eagerly, "for there are too many with him now, if your grace has private matters to speak of."

The chulo vanished, and the Hidalgo Caridad paced up and down outside the door, a prey to the deep anguish that for the time made his whole life seem dark and sad.

Despartola was not long in coming. He, of course, respectfully saluted him.

"This is a terrible affair," said Caridad. "Is it known who he is?"

"You speak of the matador who endeavoured to rival me, your grace?" said Despartola.

"I do."

"He came masked, and has remained so even until now, your grace."

"And he is dead?"

It was a needless question—one uttered in the way mourners have of hoping when all hope is lost. The matador merely bowed.

"It must have been a strange fancy that brought

him hither," said Carilad, after a pause. He was seeking to learn if Despartola had any knowledge of the name of his defeated rival.

"I never asked what it was, nor seek to know it now," replied Despartola.

"You are not concerned."

"Not at all—as to his motive."

"Suppose it should prove that he is one of noble birth?"

"Who is to prove it, your grace?"

"Well, I mean if it should become known, it will be felt by all his friends most deeply."

"Your grace means that all the best blood of Spain will revolt against the humiliation," said Despartola, quietly. "When one of such poor stuff as I am made of is slain by a bull, his name might be painted up on the walls in letters three feet high, and who would care?"

"Despartola," said Caridad, "you are a man of sense, far and away above your fellows——"

"Your grace is kind."

"A truce to your sarcasms—I mean what I say; you know how things are looked upon in my country. I am not responsible for that. Neither you nor I could alter matters, if we would."

"Your grace is right," said Despartola. "I would not alter anything—I would not change with my rival to-day, if it were possible. The poorest of dogs alive is better than the noblest of dead lions."

"You will still be bitter, I see," said Caridad, "and I like you for it. It shows pride that would always debar you from doing a mean thing. I do not ask if you will abstain from endeavouring to learn the secret of the dead man, but you will tell me if all others are as reliable as yourself"

Despartola smiled, and he stroked his chin as he looked steadily at the Hidalgo.

"I am master here," he said, "and my spirit, good or bad, rules all."

"Say that it were a duke who rashly threw his life away to-day, it is imperative that it should never be known."

"It will never be known from any here."

"Then there is no more to be said."

"Nothing on my part, your grace."

They bowed and parted. Despartola, with a dry smile on his face, closed the door. The Hidalgo Caridad slowly sauntered away.

He had done all he could towards hiding the identity of his dead friend, and the rest remained with the matador.

He might or might not be true to the trust reposed in him.

Caridad wandered away, thinking over what was next to be done.

He was not a very ready-witted man, nor one who

could be relied upon to take the right course in case of emergency. Strange to say, his mind reverted to Jim Gordon and Morse, but he hesitated about asking their advice.

"They are but boys," he murmured.

But, boys or not, it was they who eventually had much to do with solving the difficulty.

As he wandered about, he passed groups of men and women in the streets, excitedly discussing the great event of the bull-fight.

All sorts of theories were advanced, bearing on the identity of the masked matador and the reason for his entering into a rivalry with the mighty Despartola.

It pleased Caridad to find that none of these theories were within measurable distance of the truth. Some said it was an Englishman who had been slain, a tourist who intended to go home and "write a book on his experiences," others that he was from France, noble in birth, and aspiring to the throne of that country, when the Republic should have had its day.

The young Prince Napoleon risked his life—and lost it—in Zululand, so that he might make himself famous and become the darling of hero-loving France; and might not the amateur matador be another of that family?

So the people were reasoning among themselves, and not one—save those who knew it only too well—dreamt that it was the Duke of Valladolid who lay in the charnel-house of the arena.

CHAPTER CCCXXVIII.

"ALL THAT CAN BE DONE FOR HIM."



FOR those who were slain in the arena—happily, one was but rarely killed in the bull-fight—there was a resting-place for the remainder of the day and night in a small mortuary attached to the building.

On the morrow, hirelings of the place would bury him in unconsecrated ground.

A hard fate for the poorest: doubly so to one who had inherited wealth and a noble name, and had been possessed of all that makes life pleasant in boundless health, friends, and a keen enjoyment of the things of the world.

Whatever curiosity may have been felt by the ordinary attendants and bull-fighters to learn who the slain man was, they respected his wish, and he was laid in the dead-house, awaiting interment, with the close-fitting mask untouched.

But there was more than one aware of his identity.

The Hidalgo Caridad was not alone in possession of the secret. Ximena had on his entering the arena suspected it from the outset, and as he appeared the second time, that suspicion was confirmed.

Hence the cry that burst from her lips.

She desired to see no more bull-fighting, that day, anyway, and on her recovering from the short period of insensibility which followed her cry, she asked to be taken home.

So they all went, and Jim and Morse learnt from their lips that it was the duke who had entered into rivalry with the practised matador, Despartola. It was not until later on, when the fighting was over and the attendants came back to the castle, that they learnt of the fatal ending of the affair.

The Hidalgo was deeply moved, and when Ximena passionately declared that she would have no more to do with the ghastly sport, he fully approved of her resolution. As for Morse and Jim, they had had enough of it, too.

"The ring is a slaughter-house for horses and bulls," said Morse, "and the death of the duke, poor fellow, arose entirely from his inexperience."

It was late when Romeo returned, for in the excitement that ensued over the tragic end of the masked matador, the hapless nigger was forgotten.

It was entirely owing to the habit of some of the minor officials of prowling round the seats of the arena, in search of money or jewels that might have been dropped by the company, that he was not left in the bull's den all night.

"You juss catch me at one ob dem low show circuses agen," he said. "'Bout de bes' ting for me to do am to bring a traction gin dem for false 'prisonment."

Jim, to whom he made this declaration, advised him to say nothing more about it.

"You were better in the cage, Romeo," he said. "It was madness of you to join those fellows. What do you know about bull-fighting?"

"Me 'spect, Marse Jim," replied Romeo, "dat we got to hab a 'ginning."

"You narrowly escaped making an ending," said Jim, drily; "think of that poor fellow who was killed."

"Me see it," said Romeo, shivering; "dat 'nuff to sicken mose people. No more ob dem low bull circuses for me."

"We are all of one mind, then," said Jim, with a sad smile.

It was shortly after this that one of the attendants came to Jim and told him that Despartola desired to see him.

Perhaps Jim was in no mood to see one of the great lights of the horrible sport; indeed, he showed it in his face, for the attendant quickly added:

"He says that it is of the utmost importance that he should see you."

"Where is he?" asked Jim.

"In one of our rooms across the courtyard," was the answer.

Jim was alone at the time, mooning about the hall and thinking over the advisability of shortening his stay at Seville. Morse was with Ximena and the Hidalgo.

"Ask him to come here," said Jim.

In a minute Despartola appeared, and saluted Jim with deferential grace.

"It may seem a liberty, senor," he said, "but I am here to give some help, if I am permitted, in an important matter."

"I can almost for a certainty guess what you are referring to," said Jim.

"It is his grace, the Duke of Valladolid."

"You know all, then?"

"I, alone, of all my people," said the bull-fighter; "there is honour among them, and the mask has not been removed from his face."

"Knowing him, why did you permit him to risk his life?"

"Senor, it was not until he entered the arena for the last time that it flashed upon me who he was. I went up to him, and in whispered words implored him to stop."

"And he was deaf to your appeal?"

"Senor, he asked me if one of his race, having gone so far, would go back. What could I say to that?"

"True," said Jim; "and the reason of your coming is—"

"No, senor," said the matador, quickly, "not to excuse myself, for I have done no wrong. I am not accountable for all the hot blood of Spain. If the nobles risk their lives as we common people do, they must chance what comes of it. No; it was for the pity of one so bold as he was, one so noble, who will be buried like a dog unless we do something, that I came."

"It must never be known abroad that the duke sought to become a bull-fighter and failed. I am quoting the opinion expressed by the Hidalgo Toreomez."

"I understand," said Despartola. "And who shall know? I will be dumb, and none of you of the better classes"—Jim motioned in dissent to being classed among the "better classes"—"will say anything. The duke must be buried as becomes one of his people. The priest must be found who will bless him, and his bones must lie among those from whom he inherited his name. The Valladolids have a vault in the cathedral."

"Still, there are obstacles in the way."

"Yes, but they may be overcome. If the Hidalgo will go to the cardinal, he will arrange for a night

service when all Seville is asleep. His friend, the Hidalgo Caridad, can be there to see his body placed with his people, and your friend, the Senor Morse, will suffice for the bringing of the body. It can be done."

"But how account for his death?"

"Say nothing at present. By-and-by his people can say that he died abroad. They can place a monument to his memory, and be happy in the knowledge that his body lies in an honoured grave."

"Despartola," said Jim, "you show a noble spirit in all you have done. I think your plans will be gratefully approved of. But I must speak to the Hidalgo. Say that he accepts your offer, and does as you have planned for him by consenting to see the cardinal, what time shall the funeral be?"

"At one."

"And the time of my meeting you?"

"At twelve, by the fighters' entrance to the arena."

"I will be there," said Jim, "whatever arrangement may be made."

"He ought to be buried as a man," said Despartola.

"It is all we can do for him now."

CHAPTER CCCXXIX.

THE FUNERAL IN THE SMALL HOURS OF THE MORNING.



IMEDIATELY the Hidalgo heard of the suggestion of Despartola, he highly approved of it.

"Surely," he exclaimed, "there must be noble blood in the man!"

Jim smiled. The remark was such as might be expected from one with the Spaniards' pride of race. Without being intentionally unkind or unjust, he, like all his class of the country, was not wont to attribute high motives to the lower orders.

The only part of it he objected to was Jim's going out at midnight; but that was overruled by the person most interested.

"There is nothing to fear," he said; "and if there is, I shall be prepared."

The arrangement was kept from Ximena, and as she retired early, the Hidalgo was able to secretly betake himself to the cardinal's palace to interview that functionary.

No doubt there were obstacles in the way; but they could be, and were, overcome. By half-past ten

o'clock the Hidalgo came back with the tidings that the cardinal, on certain moneys being paid for masses and other things connected with the Church, had agreed that the duke could be interred in secret.

For the rest that had to be done, that would be the work of time.

It was an uncanny business to be upon, but Jim was getting used to all sorts of experiences, and shortly before midnight he left the castle with Morse. Romeo was instructed to sit up for them.

The sky, for a change, was not clear. It was covered with a thick haze, one even spread of sombre cloud.

The lighting of Seville being in its infancy, the streets were very dark. It was a splendid night for the assassin, if any of that breed happened to be abroad.

With their revolvers ready, and eyes on the watch as they passed every deep doorway and turning, the two friends hastened towards their destination.

They had little difficulty in finding the arena, as the route was getting familiar to them, although occasionally, owing to the gloom, they were not quite sure of the street they were in.

The huge building loomed up in due time, and they found the bull-fighter's entrance, with Despartola awaiting them.

"I have the key, senor," he said, "and, behold! I have a conveyance ready."

It was a long, low-built barrow, used to convey fruit about the city by the native costers. Despartola had borrowed it without the owner's leave.

"He might have some qualms about the use we must put it to," he said.

The quarters of the bull-fighters might have served for the storage of wine or beer, being passages and rooms of stone, shady and cool on the brightest day. Despartola lighted a lantern and led the way.

A low, moaning sound startled his companions; but the matador explained the origin of it ere they could ask what it was.

"The toro which killed the duke," he said. "The confinement does not please his majesty. He is thinking of the pastures he has left, and to which he will never return. I will kill him next week, when we are to have another fight."

The mortuary lay at the back of the dressing-room, a gruesome, barren den of a place, with one trestle, on which lay the body of the duke.

"We may remove the mask now," said Despartola. "The cardinal will not inter a man with his face hidden."

"Will so great a man perform the ceremony?" asked Jim, in surprise.

"He will be there, with a father perhaps to do the talking. There will be little of it, duke though the poor fellow was."

There was peace upon the face of the dead man, always handsome, but beautiful in death. The placidity of perfect repose was on the features.

"With so much peace hereafter as his face shows," said Despartola, "who would not envy him?"

He covered the face with a silken handkerchief, and taking one end of the trestle, bade Jim and Morse take charge of the other.

In a slow, measured way they walked through the outer rooms and passages to the droning of the dissatisfied bull.

With such reverence as they could show in their needed haste, they laid the body on the barrow and covered it close with a long cloth, part of one of the awnings used in the arena to keep off the rays of the sun.

On they went in the direction of the cathedral. Not a living creature was encountered by the way.

The beautiful building could only be imperfectly seen in the darkness. The main door was closed and fast. They were to be admitted by the verger's entrance, which opened softly as they arrived.

It was a solemn scene Jim looked upon as they entered the cathedral with their burden.

Ahead, in the left-hand aisle, a light was burning, near a dark square patch, which was the opening of the Valladolid family vault.

By it stood three figures, the Hidalgo Toreomez and his companion noble, Caridad, and a tall old man in a scarlet robe.

The latter was the cardinal. It was a monk who admitted the *cortège*, and he lent a hand with the trestle, keeping his face concealed with an ample cowl.

The service was short, and intoned in Latin. Then all but the cardinal lent a hand in lowering the dead man to the flooring below.

"On the morrow," whispered the monk, "the brethren will place him in the sarcophagus allotted to him."

As soon as the ceremony was over the cardinal uttered a hurried blessing on all, and those who had to leave hurried away.

In silence the Hidalgo and his guests proceeded home, and Romeo let them in.

"Senors," said the Hidalgo, as the gate closed, "this is no time for words. My heart is too sad. I knew his father. We studied at Madrid together. He was almost a stranger to you. Let his name rest while you are in Spain."

He left them, and Romeo lit the chamber-lamps for his young masters.

Knowing nothing of the errand they had been upon he was consumed with curiosity, but they would tell him nothing.

"We have not been out on an evil expedition," said Jim, "be assured of that. Good-night, Romeo."

"Good-night, Marse Jim and Morse," replied Romeo.

Left to himself, he tried to account for their recent absence, but hit upon anything but the right cause.

"It not courting," he muttered, "for here dere nuffin' done unless you able to bang de geetar. Nor am it gamblin', for Marse Jim dead against dat. Mebbe it be neider, though. Or perhaps it to see de Seville ghostesses. Dis 'bout a good night for dem. 'Spec' some ob dem follow de boys home, so me bes' get away to bed."

Which he promptly did.

CHAPTER CCCXXX.

THE HOMEWARD-BOUND BOYS.



WHILE these stirring events were going on in Seville the "Victor" proceeded quietly on her way. The boys missed Jim and Morse sorely, and they were talked of incessantly with a feeling akin to sadness.

"I almost wish myself back again," said Terry, one evening, as the vessel sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar and bore away up the Atlantic, "if only to have them with us."

"Provided, of course," remarked Ganthony, "that we all got away in the end as safe as we are now."

"It was little less than a series of miracles that brought us out of our troubles," remarked Felton.

"The deeds of genius may often be called miracles," said Dibble, who was playing with Charley, the bear.

That sagacious beast had his freedom again, having exhibited no more tendencies to jump over the side of the vessel and swim after the Hidalgo's yacht. He was a firmly-established favourite with all the seamen, who taught him a variety of new tricks without much trouble.

One of them was irresistibly comical. When there was any cleaning to be done, there was Charley with a broom sweeping right and left in the inconsequential style of trained animals, satisfied with disturbing the dirt without caring a straw what became of it. He had also been taught to handle buckets of water when the deck was being sluiced down, and the way he tossed the water right and left in total disregard of the legs of anybody near him was a source of ineffable and endless delight to his teachers.

"I think the beggar is almost human," said Terry, as he watched the bear playfully sparring with Dibble, dealing the boy, with his huge paws, blows so light that they would scarcely have hurt a fly.

The one and only person who still loathed the beast was Mr. Farrell.

Charley treated him with lordly indifference, but the schoolmaster always avoided him as a dangerous and violent enemy.

He was standing just then by the side of the vessel with the mate, who was surveying the ocean with a pair of binoculars in the vain hope of espying the yacht of the Hidalgo.

"We ought to have overhauled her by this time," muttered the mate.

"You will never overhaul her," remarked Mr. Farrell, in his old authoritative way, "with a madman for an owner. What do you think will become of her?"

"Well, if he is allowed to take the helm," replied the mate, coolly, "she may probably meet with the same fate as your school—suffer a wrecking."

"Sir," said Mr. Farrell, "you are grossly impertinent. It was not I who wrecked the school, but the boys I had for pupils."

"Indeed," sneered the mate; "how came that about?"

The boys were silent now, listening to the conversation. It interested them nearly.

"I was placed in a position that required all the nerve and coolness of a *man*," said Mr. Farrell, "and had I not exhibited it, not one of the boys now on board would be alive. It was one perpetual struggle between me and those two misguided lads, Gordon and Morse, but my counsels always in the end prevailed."

The mate glanced at him with a sarcastic gleam in his eyes, but he said nothing. Having heard all the facts of the life on the island, the cool assurance of the egotistical old man amused him. He was not disposed to resent it.

Not so the boys who were listening.

Had Morse and Jim been there, no heed would have been paid to the stupid arrogance of Mr. Farrell, but Terry and the rest were not disposed to listen with patience to reflections on their gallant young leaders, that had no foundation in fact.

Dibble was especially wroth, and seeing that Charley was also, in his way, suddenly interested in the two men talking together, he quietly stole up with the bear at his heels, and motioned to Charley to give him a friendly dig in the back.

This was one of the tricks taught Charley by the seamen. The brute hesitated, and seemed for a moment more disposed to do violence to the schoolmaster; but eventually he simply obeyed Dibble's directions, and administered a dig with his doubled-up paws in Mr. Farrell's back.

The startled schoolmaster, who was about to carry his denunciations of the conduct of Jim and Morse

still further, turned round, and perceiving Charley on his hind legs, indulging in the preliminary movements of a scientific boxer, uttered a yell, and bolting down below, was seen no more that night.

"That's the man of nerve and resource," said the mate, smiling. "Boys, I wonder more and more that any of you are here, and aboard the 'Victor,' homeward bound."

He walked away to attend to his duties, and the boys resumed their talk of the doings of their hero-friends until it was time to turn in.

That night the wind, which had hitherto been steady, increased to a gale, blowing hard from the south-west, and the "Victor" had to bear off the coast, which was too near to be pleasant in a gale.

It blows hard in that region when there is anything approaching a storm, and the huge seas broke against the vessel's side with tremendous force, the water pouring over and sweeping the decks with an almost irresistible power.

Some of the top-hamper was carried away, in spite of a great portion of the canvas being furled, and the men of the watch had all they could do to keep themselves from being carried away also.

Charley being, by his nature as a beast, a deck-passenger, excited the admiration of all that saw his coolness in this hour of trial.

Standing with his back to the gale, and his arms claspng the mainmast, he ignored the drenching he received, and, according to some of his admirers, slept through the storm.

But that may be put down as one of those seamen's fables that go to make up a fitting yarn to be told round the galley-fire.

Below, sleep was hardly possible, and save with regard to some of the better-nerved youngsters, all the passengers were unable, and kept at a high state of tension by the prospect of being wrecked.

Chorker passed an awful night, so did Mr. Farrell, being loud in their denunciations of their past lives, and prodigal with their promises of amendment in the future.

The morning broke with the wind still raging, and none but those who had need to be there, were allowed on deck.

The boys behaved admirably, their chief expressions of regret arising from their inability to see Cape Trafalgar, off which the "Victor" had to stand at a distance of many miles, so that it was invisible.

It was a dreary time below, spent in the chief cabin, which was poor accommodation for so many, and one and all voted that nothing on the island had half so much depressed them. It was a terrible experience, to hear the roaring of the wind and the thunderous crash of the heavy seas breaking over the vessel.

As for anything like an orderly meal, it was impossible, for the "Victor" listed so that none but experienced sailors could keep their feet; and those of the passengers who rashly attempted to walk about the cabins speedily found themselves shooting to leeward and colliding against the fixed seats, with a force that shook them into a chaotic state of mind.

But there were not wanting those who made fun of sitting on the floor, with "thumb pieces" of bread-and-meat for dinner; but the general feeling was one of relief when the gale began to subside.

The heavy sea still rolled, it is true, but all danger was past; and when the evening came the sky was clear, and all who cared to were allowed once more to go on deck.

They had a sad experience that day of the nature of disasters at sea. About noon the lookout-man announced "a hull of a ship on the lee-bow." It lay off near the horizon, and the "Victor" bore down towards it, to see if there was anyone on board to be saved.

The vessel was a trader named the "Black Swan." All her masts were gone, and not a boat was visible; but there was a solitary figure aft frantically waving a white cloth or sheet.

The "Victor" stood in and lay to at a safe distance. A boat was lowered, and the sea being calmer, the second mate and half a dozen of the crew succeeded in getting alongside the wreck and mounting to the deck.

The lone figure was a seaman who had been sick in his berth at the time the storm shattered the rigging of the "Black Swan."

What had become of the officers and crew he did not know, but as the davits bore signs of the boats having been torn therefrom, and not lowered in the usual way, the assumption was that all but the sick man had been swept into the sea and drowned.

As nothing, indeed, was ever heard of the lost ones afterwards, the surmise was undoubtedly correct.

The one man rescued was conveyed to the "Victor," and it required all the care of those who had charge of him to keep him from utter collapse.

As for the "Black Swan," she was in a sinking condition, and beyond securing her log-book and a few valuable nautical instruments, nothing was saved.

She sank while the "Victor" was in sight of her, slowly turning on her side, then raising her bow into the air, and majestically gliding down to the bottom of the deep.

It made a great impression on the voyagers, for they naturally thought the fate of the "Black Swan" might have been that of the "Victor"; but such a feeling was evanescent, with the younger portion, at least.

Before darkness had been with them an hour, the customary amusements in the cabin were in full swing.

There were recitations, songs, and dances, all more or less strongly spiced with originality of treatment.

Then, at the accepted hour, they stole away to their berths. "Lights out" was heard, and with only the quiet members of the watch on deck, the "Victor" ploughed her way gaily over the waves.

CHAPTER CCCXXI.

FAREWELL TO SEVILLE.



THE Hidalgo's daughter was not inconsolable over the loss of the duke. He was a recently-made friend, and she liked him very much. But what upset her was that she realised he had virtually sacrificed his life for her sake.

But Spanish women are apt to claim all things from men as their right, and she was Spanish to the core.

Within a day or so she was as cheerful as heretofore, and went about the city with her two guest cavaliers, flirting, it must be confessed, desperately with Morse.

Morse was not a gallant by nature, but Ximena had touched some chord in his youthful breast that sounded a deep note there, and suddenly made him feel years older.

Jim took a back place with the greatest coolness. Once more he was thinking of Eveline, and feeling rather ashamed of the way he had been paying attention to the Spanish beauty.

"And, after all," he thought, "the whole thing is rubbish. But it will do Morse good. He wants lifting out of the chemical business."

Thenceforth their life in Seville, which lasted three weeks longer, was a round of pleasure, but we have no space to put on record the details.

The Hidalgo entertained, and was entertained in his turn. There were dinners, dancing, and garden-parties, where all that is beautiful in Spanish life was to be seen.

But Jim and Morse wearied of it.

They longed to get back to their colder, but more stimulating land. They were tired of nothing but pleasure day after day. It was like a feast that was all plum-pudding.

And they knew, too, that the most welcome of guests can wear out his welcome, so one morning Jim spoke to the Hidalgo of returning home.

"I shall miss you," said the old nobleman, "but you must come again. There will always be a welcome for you here."

To Morse the Hidalgo spoke in even kindlier terms.

"To your sound common-sense, the great gift of your people," he said, "I owe my recovery from a fool's paradise. That is a thing I can never repay. My daughter Ximena——"

"She owes me nothing," interposed Morse, quickly.

"She thinks otherwise. It is a pity you are so young——" The old nobleman hesitated. Morse again had a word to put in.

"I shall grow older," he said.

"Come back when you are a man and see us again," said the Hidalgo. "The years quickly pass. The time of manhood soon comes."

He said no more, but the heart of Morse beat faster. He fancied he understood the meaning of the Hidalgo. Assuredly he understood Ximena when he was talking of parting from her.

"I do not like to let you go," she said.

"You will miss Jim more," replied Morse.

"Pooh!" said Ximena, lightly. "Your friend Jim is good, he is brave, and he is nice-looking, but a friend to me—no more."

"You were very good friends," insisted the matter-of-fact Morse.

"Why?" asked Ximena; "because you looked any way but at me. So I say to myself, 'I will make him look,' and you did. Do you deny it?"

"No," said Morse, "for I could not help it."

And then they talked of Jim no more, but of themselves, and a possible future with which this story will have little or no concern.

Jim and Morse were to leave by a steamer that would touch at Cadiz on her way home to the London Docks. The Hidalgo wrote to some agent in that seaport town to secure them berths, and it was done.

Then the day of departure arrived.

No barge this time to skim over the waters of the Guadalquivir. A passenger steamboat would convey them to the port.

It left at the hour of noon, and half an hour before the leave-taking was got through with.

Ximena must have bidden Morse adieu in private, for she had little to say to him when the parting came. All her attention was taken up with Jim.

"Give my love to Eveline—have I got her name right?" she said. "Yes, I see I have. You may write to me sometimes."

"I will put a letter in with Morse's," replied Jim, maliciously. They both laughed.

Parting with the Hidalgo was a graver matter, for he was ceremonious at all times. For the servants the two guests left some money in a bag, to be divided, and perhaps fought over, if they were so minded.

"Your country," said the Hidalgo, as a parting-word, "will one day be proud of you both."

And then they found themselves crossing the river

to get on board the steamer, with a misty idea that after all the whole thing must have been a dream.

With the end of their visit their own apparel was resumed, but the ancient attire they had worn of late was packed away in their boxes as a memento of their visit.

On the steamer were some tourists, noisy and rather vulgar as usual, although there were some quiet, well-behaved Britishers among them. They stared at the sunburnt youths who had come from the oldest castle in Seville, and were disposed to be inquiring.

But Jim wanted to think, and he walked to the prow of the steamer, where he and Morse stood with their eyes on the city fast gliding by.

"At present," said Jim, "things have got into a jumble. But I suppose we shall be able to sort the details of our visit by-and-by?"

"Of course," replied Morse, dreamily, "but for the moment I can only keep one matter in my mind."

"Ximena," said Jim.

Morse made no answer, and Romeo at that moment appearing with iced drinks, the subject of the Spanish beauty was dropped.

CHAPTER CCCXXXII.

THE VOYAGE HOME.—A STRANGE PASSENGER.



THE steamer on which our friends found themselves at Cadiz was not a fast ocean liner. She was almost as much of a trader as a passenger-vessel, the finer ships not putting into that port.

There was no steerage, but the two dozen or so on board were all so-called saloon passengers. They had small cabins for two, and dined with the officers of the vessel.

On the whole she was fairly comfortable, but the rations were not so good or so well served as on the better-class ships. Morse and Jim were not, however, the fellows to complain.

They shared a cabin which kept them together, and secured for them a limited amount of privacy. They could at least have a quiet chat after they had retired for the night.

Of the officers it is unnecessary to say much. They were good seamen, and knew their work, which they performed in a quiet, unobtrusive way. Such courtesies as were needed they favoured their passengers with,

but they did not often share in their little social evenings held on deck, or in the main cabin, as the weather arranged.

There was only one female among the passengers, a tall, pedantic old woman, who was engaged in writing all the day long. It was currently reported that she was writing a novel.

"Just the party for the work," said one Jopley, a commercial traveller homeward bound after his business tour in the south of Spain. "How she must glow when she comes to the love scenes! There is pathos and all that sort of thing in her deep blue eye."

The men were all about of his class, mostly engaged in various lines of business. They were not a bad sort of fellows, taking them all round, but the higher courtesies of man in his bearing towards woman-kind could not be expected of them.

As the scribbling woman had given no name, they called her "Our Mary Anne."

Not to her face, for there was something in her cold grey eye—which Jopley said was a deep blue—that forbade them taking liberties with her name, or approaching her with cheerful familiarity.

Jim and Morse were friendly enough with the men, but not on what may be termed an intimacy.

"Our Mary Anne," said another passenger—Mudstone was his name—"is getting through the first volume. She has nearly filled that big memorandum-book."

It was in books of that description the one lady passenger was writing. Whatever was the subject she was engaged upon, she showed no signs of being short of ideas, for the pen moved to and fro unceasingly, and she never paused to make corrections.

Mudstone was something of a mystery to his fellow-passengers.

He was a tall, showy-looking man, and wore good clothes, and more jewellery than was considered by Jim to be consistent with good taste. He was very fond of card playing, and whenever he could induce any of his companions to take a hand at *écarté*, or any other game which two could play, he invariably came out a winner.

This fact had become so apparent that eventually they fought shy of playing with him. Ere they had long left Cadiz—to be absolutely correct, it was the very next day—he tried what he could do with Jim.

"Life is very slow on board this hulk," he said. "Without cards it would be intolerable."

"Indeed," said Jim.

"You play, of course?" was Mudstone's next remark.

"No, not since I played patience at home."

"Let me teach you *écarté*, just to pass the time."

"I would rather not."

"You are quite sure?"

"Certain."

Then he tried Morse, who asked him coolly what good would come of tossing pieces of pasteboard about with no visible object but to see who could hold the best cards.

"Play for money, then," urged Mudstone.

"I have no money to spare," replied Morse.

"But you may win."

"I have no desire to win the money of others."

Mudstone, thus rebuffed, took a dislike to the boys, and declared in their hearing that they were about as sociable as "Our Mary Anne." But the sarcasm fell flat, for the youngsters were liked by the rest of the passengers.

On the evening of the second day Mudstone talked about his affairs, seemingly because there was nothing else to do. He had been in Syria, he declared, where he had been exploring and found *something*—he was mysterious here—that was as good as a gold-mine.

"What is it?" asked Jopley.

"Sparklers," said Mudstone. "Ancient jewels in tombs."

"You've got them on board, perhaps?" sarcastically remarked the commercial.

"I may have, and I may not," was the rejoinder.

"If you have," continued Jopley, "you might let us have a look at them. I am a judge of ancient jewellery, being in the imitation trade."

"The imitation trade?"

"You needn't be quite so contemptuous. We generally found our work on some old model." However, it's quite clear you haven't your find on board, so we will say nothing more about it."

But Mudstone was nettled, and declared he would show them a sample of his prize, and went down below to get it.

Returning, he exhibited a fine bracelet of massive gold, set with precious stones. It was evidently so good that it excited the admiration of all assembled, and even Our Mary Anne, who was writing hard by, looked up for a moment from her work to gaze at it.

But her interest could not have been very great, for with a repressed yawn she resumed her labours.

"That wants beating," said Mudstone, "and it is only a poor sample of the lot."

"You are a lucky man," said one of the passengers. Farley was his name on the list. "I will give you twenty pounds for it."

"Twenty hundreds you mean," contemptuously returned Mudstone. "My dear fellow, there is nothing like it in the old country."

"If you will give me the address of your find," said Jopley, facetiously, "I will stop the 'Fleetwing' and take a trot back to Syria."

"Fleetwing" was the name of the steamer, probably bestowed upon her because she was one of the slowest vessels of her class afloat.

"You would get your throat cut," growled Mudstone.

He dropped the bracelet carelessly into his pocket and turned the subject, apparently sorry that he had been induced in a moment of weakness to reveal his possession of so valuable an article.

Shortly after, he went below and was seen no more that night.

"Mudstone is a strange sort of fellow," said Jopley, "and I don't quite make him out."

And that was the view taken by them all, saving Our Mary Anne, who wrote on as long as the light permitted, and then vanished, presumably to her cabin.

CHAPTER CCCXXXIII.

A GREAT ROBBERY.



ON the following morning all the passengers assembled at the breakfast-table, Mudstone alone excepted.

He was later than usual, his habits being those of an early riser.

At the head of the table sat the captain, bearded to the eyes, taciturn as he was wont to be, and quietly looking to the wants of the passengers.

Presently, when the meal was nearly over, Mudstone, imperfectly attired, burst into the cabin, his eyes wildly glaring, and his whole body quivering with excitement.

"Captain!" he cried, "I've been robbed!"

All stared aghast. Our Mary Anne regarded the man with indignant surprise.

"Robbed!" he shrieked, "of twenty thousand pounds, or its value in jewellery!"

"Be careful what you are saying, sir," said the captain, warningly.

"I repeat what I have said," cried Mudstone. "I have been robbed—robbed—robbed!"

There could be little doubt about it. The man was horribly in earnest. The jewel exhibited the evening before flashed before the memory of all who had seen it.

"I was a fool," said Mudstone, hoarsely, "to let anyone know what I had with me. I might have looked for something of this sort if I did."

"Draw it mild, will you!" cried Jopley, angrily. "Do you accuse any of us here of robbing you?"

"Somebody has done it," hissed Mudstone, half-beside himself with rage.

"Stop a moment," said the captain; "you are the one man passenger who has a cabin for his special use, I believe?"

"I paid for it, didn't I?"

"I am not talking about your paying for it. You have a cabin to yourself?"

"I have."

"Do you lock your door at night?"

"I do, and in the daytime, too. I make my own bed."

"All the keys are different," said the captain. "There are duplicates, which I have in my possession under lock and key in my cabin. They have been lying in my drawer for months untouched."

"Somebody must have got at them."

"We will soon see about that."

The captain disappeared, a grim silence being maintained until he reappeared with a bunch of keys in his possession.

"Point out the one which matches yours," he said.

Mudstone did so, and the captain smiled.

"You see," he said, "it is impossible for this to have been used. Here is a small cobweb spun across the wards days or weeks ago by some little spider which succeeded in getting into the drawer."

This was evidence of the key not having been employed by the thief, if thief there were, which could not be gainsaid.

"Used or not," said Mudstone, wiping his forehead with his shirt-sleeve, "I've been robbed."

"Who has seen the jewellery besides yourself?" was the next question from the captain.

The exhibition of the bracelet was mentioned, and its probable value given by Mudstone.

"That is a tenth of your reported loss," said the captain. "Have you a list of the other articles?"

"I can make it out," said Mudstone.

"Do it, then," returned the captain, curtly.

"Before we go any further," said Jopley, "I wish to say that my traps are open for inspection."

"And mine."

"And mine."

The chorus was a general one, the voice of Our Mary Anne rising shrilly above all others.

"I leave the lady out," said Mudstone, "but I am willing that the luggage of the rest should be inspected."

"They can do as they please about permitting it," said the captain. "Would you like to look over my cabin?"

"I don't know what to do," moaned Mudstone; "this loss will drive me mad."

And indeed it seemed that he was already not far away from that condition of mind.

The passengers insisting on their luggage being inspected and their cabins searched, Jim and Morse including themselves in the list, it was done, Our Mary Anne's boxes being alone left unexamined.

She dragged them outside her cabin, unlocked them,

and offered their contents for examination, but Mudstone refused to look at them.

"It was not done by a woman," he declared; "some clever man has got at my trunk. The lock of that, as well as the lock of the door, was skilfully picked."

Nothing came of the search. Nowhere in the boxes or trunks were there any signs of the lost treasure, or of the skeleton-key which must have been used—provided, of course, that a robbery had really taken place.

"I will sue the owners of the vessel to recover," said Mudstone; they are just as liable as hotel-keepers."

"That remains to be seen," said the captain; "but don't forget, sir, that you have not yet proved you had the property on board."

"I showed a portion of it last night," replied Mudstone.

"I won't swear it wasn't imitation stuff," said Jopley. "We get up things so well nowadays that it is almost impossible to tell the real from the false, without testing."

"But the bracelet is gone."

"You may have chucked it into the sea to make a bogus claim upon the shipowners."

It was a somewhat malicious suggestion, that roused Mudstone to frenzy. He went for Jopley, and a fight would have ensued, if the captain had not interfered.

"If I have anything in that way," he said, "I will put you in irons, sir."

"He should not make such suggestions, then," muttered Mudstone.

As for any of the seamen or working officials of the "Fleetwing" having done the deed, it was considered impossible. Mudstone went back to his cabin to finish his dressing, and to rummage the place over and over again in the vain hope of discovering what he had lost.

With a theme for a full morning's conversation the other passengers went on deck. Our Mary Anne alone held aloof, going on with that everlasting writing of hers as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER CCCXXXIV.

MR. MUDSTONE IS ASTONISHED.



WHAT do you make of this robbery?" Jim asked Morse, as they lounged apart from the rest.

"It is a puzzle," replied Morse.

"You think the man has been robbed?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Who, then, is the robber?"

"Jim, you expect too much of me. How should I know?"

"You can guess."

"Oh, if it comes to guessing, I will have a shot at it. I think Our Mary Anne knows something about it."

"That woman?"

"Yes, *that* woman. I noted her manner during the row below, and I saw her eyes twinkling knowingly."

"You ought to give Mudstone a hint."

"I would rather not interfere with it, Jim—at least, not at present. It will not be a long time ere we are at home. The steamer will not touch at Oporto, as we thought she would."

Jim glanced in the direction of the woman, and it did seem possible that she might have committed the robbery. Her features wore a hard look, and they seemed coarser than they had hitherto been.

"By George!" he thought, "she may be the party. But what a cunning wretch she must have been, so confidently to offer her boxes for inspection!"

If Our Mary Anne had the jewellery, it was a hundred chances to one that it must be among her luggage. The opportunities for the concealment of anything outside the cabins of a ship are exceedingly small. If she were guilty, Jim was determined she should not go scot-free.

He did not like Mudstone. The man repelled him both by his manner and appearance. The better elements of manhood were lacking in him.

But the meanest creature on earth is entitled to retain possession of his own, and if he had really unearthed valuables from some corner in Syria, he was the rightful owner of them.

"Probably he came across some mummy graves," thought Jim.

But how was he to go to work?

It would do no great harm if he suggested to Mudstone that the boxes of Our Mary Anne should be searched, even if nothing came of it.

She had previously offered them for inspection, and could hardly back out when asked to allow it to be done, without confirming the suspicions which had first found utterance from Morse.

He determined to give a hint to the man, but first of all he must get him somewhere alone, so that what passed might be entirely private.

The excited man went up and down, first a minute or two on deck, and then wandering below, distracted by his loss; but in the course of an hour Jim succeeded in bringing about a supposed chance meeting in the main cabin.

"I should like to have a few words with you, Mr. Mudstone," he said.

"I am not in the mind to talk," was the reply.

"I can think of nothing but my lost jewels."

"It is of them," said Jim, "that I desire to speak."

"Talking will not help me."

"We will see about that. Now as to the examination of the boxes, you spared one passenger."

"A woman. What else could I do?"

"A woman or not, it would have been more satisfactory if the examination of her luggage had taken place."

"You think so?" murmured Mudstone, regarding him attentively.

"She offered her boxes for examination, and if you tell her you have changed your mind, thinking it will be better to remove all possible suspicion from her by overhauling her effects, she will not refuse, unless——"

"Go on," said Mudstone, seeing that Jim paused.

"Unless," continued Jim, lowering his voice, "it should unhappily prove that she is the guilty party. One thing will immediately settle that point."

"And that is?"

"Her refusing your application to examine her boxes. It will show that her first offer was what is called bluff, and bluff sometimes pays."

"You are right there," said Mudstone; "it does. You hit the nail squarely. I will suggest it to her."

"If you like I will do it myself. It will only be right, seeing that the suggestion comes from me."

"No, no; I will do it; and if she refuses I will apply to the captain to have it done against her will."

He was fairly worked up to a pitch that was essential to his carrying out Jim's idea. That no time should be lost, he went at once on deck, where he found the writer busy as usual.

He had no name by which to address her, "Our Mary Anne" being for private use only, so he merely raised his cap, and asked her if she would step below with him for a moment, adding:

"I think I have discovered where my jewellery is."

It was the turn of Our Mary Anne to look alarmed now. Guilty knowledge was written on her countenance.

"I will come with you," she said, hurriedly. "Do not say more with these people about."

Eyes were upon them, and mouths opened in astonishment as they disappeared together. Jim was still in the cabin, bent on boldly taking his share of the unpleasant business.

"I thought you were gone," exclaimed Mudstone.

"Why should I go?" asked Jim. "I see you have adopted my suggestion."

"What suggestion?" sharply asked Our Mary Anne.

"I suggested that you be asked to permit your boxes being searched, after all," answered Jim.

"For what reason?"

"It would remove all possible doubt that might rise in the minds of others."

"Your mind, you mean, young man."

"No, the idea did not spring from there, but I adopted it."

"In the mind of your friend, perhaps?"

"I daresay, if you ask him the question, he will truthfully answer for himself."

"I have been observing both of you, and my opinion is that you are two clever boys."

"Spoken sarcastically, of course?"

"No, honestly," and the face of Our Mary Anne was quite placid, "your shrewdness has embarrassed me. An unexpected climax has arrived, and I must face and make the best of it."

"You have my jewellery," eagerly cried Mudstone.

"I have," was the reply.

"Give it up to me," said Mudstone, "and I won't make the least fuss about it."

"You will forgive me?"

"Ay, right heartily. It is the most amusing thing I ever met with, that bit of bluff of yours."

"I hardly hoped it would be accepted by you," said Our Mary Anne, "but it paid for the time. But for these youngsters, it might have paid right through. But," with a sigh, "I must make the best of the exposure. Come with me."

Mudstone only paused a moment to seize Jim's hand and wring it heartily ere he followed Our Mary Anne, who with measured steps walked to her cabin. It was situated immediately behind the saloon, and opening the door, she motioned for Mudstone to enter.

"What you have lost is in that box," she said, pointing to one in the corner on the right.

The lid was up, and, with a cry of delight, he rushed in and threw himself down upon his knees.

The next moment he felt a steel-like grip upon the back of his neck.

He was twisted round, thrown down, and in a moment his wrists were clasped by bands of steel. The name of handcuffs is professionally bestowed upon them.

CHAPTER CCCXXXV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE JEWELLERY.



MUDSTONE was too much taken aback to offer the slightest resistance. Not even when his hands were secured did he resort to those often active measures of resentment embodied in kicking his legs about.

On the contrary, he lay perfectly still, staring at his captor, who calmly proceeded to bind his legs with the cord of a trunk.

"I want quietude," said Our Mary Anne, coolly, "while I change my dress."

This is a thing ladies do at least once a day, and changing dress means a good hour's work, with much exercise of mind as to what is best to wear. What did Our Mary Anne mean by her strange conduct?

The mystery was speedily solved.

First of all a wig was removed, disclosing a close-cut head of dark hair, the very opposite in texture and colour to the tow-like mass previously worn.

There was no mistaking then that Our Mary Anne was not a woman, but a man.

And what was more, to the terror and confusion of Mudstone, he was evidently a man of authority—in short, a detective.

"You know me now," he said.

"Curse you," growled Mudstone, "you are Banks, the police officer I saw in Cairo."

"The same, at your service. When you cleared out the jewel-box of Musjid Pasha, you little thought that you were suspected. A man high in office in the household of that potentate was dismissed with disgrace under suspicion. I have undertaken to reinstate him, for he was my friend."

"How came you to suspect me?"

"I cast about for a likely party, and you were the man I selected. But I could not tell whether you had the property about you or not. Your leaving Cairo might be a mere blind, with the jewels lying hidden in some secret corner, awaiting your speedy return. So I got myself up as a literary lady, intensely occupied in my work. It saved me from jawing to you fellows. A man is sure, sooner or later, to reveal his sex, if he talks too much. I could also keep an eye on you without appearing to do so."

"I see it all," groaned Mudstone; "it was my con-founded folly in exhibiting that bracelet which gave you the clue you wanted."

"Right," said Banks the detective, who was rapidly replacing his womanly attire with the garments of his real sex; "that was what did the trick. I could have got into your cabin a score of times if I had been so minded, but I left that move to the last, in case I roused your suspicions. You are just the man to throw everything overboard rather than be convicted."

The face of Mudstone became dark as a thunder-cloud with the bitterness he felt.

"Go on," he said; "out with the whole shoot."

"Satisfied at last that you had the stuff with you," pursued Banks, with relish, "I waited last night until your snores made the night hideous. Then with one of my little infallible keys I opened your door, with another I got at the trunk, and then, to make sure against accidents, I carried the stuff away."

"Afterwards playing the game of bluff," said Mudstone, savagely.

"And it paid," said Banks, cheerfully, "Well, you must come out of this, so that I may make arrangements with the captain for your safe-keeping."

He unfastened the legs of the captive, and helped him to rise. On leaving the cabin he locked the door, and conveyed him to the main cabin where Jim still was, and gave him a staggerer in turn.

But half a dozen words made matters clear, and Jim volunteered to fetch the captain.

A short delay ensued. Then the commander appeared, with two of his men carrying ship-irons, wherewith to make sure of the safe-keeping of the prisoner. Jim had told him all that was necessary, and being a man of prompt action, he came prepared.

"This job won't do me any harm," said Banks, as they marched the prisoner forward, with all the other passengers agog with surprise; "that man is known at home as the most notoriously successful hotel thief of modern times. We are able to convict him at home, and the pasha can have his jewels without any worry. My friend will be reinstated, and he will not forget to see me rewarded for my trouble."

"It would make a story," suggested Jim.

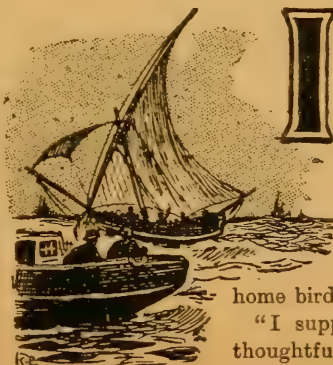
"None of your chaff, young man," said the detective, with a good-humoured smile: "I am not a literary woman. I filled those memorandum-books with just anything that came into my head—bits of serious poetry, comic songs, rubbish."

He laughed; so did Jim; but the prisoner did not even smile. The joke was not at all to his liking. It hit him too hard.

They placed him in a sort of cell which had, on rare occasions, been occupied by refractory seamen, and left him to his meditations.

CHAPTER CCCXXXVI.

WHEN THE SHIP CAME HOME.



IN sight of the old country once more," said Jim. "After all, there is no place like home."

"We feel it so now," said Morse; "but you and I are not built for

home birds."

"I suppose not," said Jim, thoughtfully.

Nor were they. Of such as they roamers abroad are made.

Nations are like large families. Some of the

members stay at home; others wander away, carried thither by the instinct within them that prompts them to carry their name and race into unknown lands.

All things point to the survival of the fittest. Inferior races go down before the better ones, and the best—in a spreading and acquiring sense, anyway—hitherto known in the world are the inhabitants of the British Isles.

They go forth, and where they plant their feet there they eventually stand.

Neither rebuffs, nor sudden disasters, not even the total annihilation of the first-comers, daunt us as a people. More go out to fill the vacant places, and as sure as the sun shines they, sooner or later, will keep them.

But it was very nice to see the old country again.

Morse had few, if any, friends or relatives to trouble about. His father had always been a retired man, and became more so after the death of his wife. The motherless child grew up among men who had but one love. Its name was Science.

Hence his remarkable early development in that direction, and it was not until he went to the Island School that the softer and more boyish element appeared in him.

How it had been fostered by his companionship with Jim we have seen, and their friendship was now a thing that would not pass away until life should be no more.

It would develop and grow into the stronger love of man for his friend, and Science would no more entirely claim him for her own.

They were passing the Needles, off the Isle of Wight, when Jim gave vent to the remark about "home." The long line of white cliffs running up the Channel was bathed in moonlight; a breeze from the west helped the steamer on her way. All the passengers were on deck, hailing their native land with more or less enthusiasm.

Jopley, the commercial traveller, was no stranger to the feeling. He was accustomed, once a year, to leave home and roam abroad on business, returning in due time to find the sight of the shores of Old England a welcome one.

It meant for him a time spent with wife and family, and when he had done a good amount of business it also led to satisfactory pecuniary results and the approval of his employers.

"The missus," he said to Farley, "will meet me at Gravesend with my eldest boy. It is her annual trip of pleasure, and she makes the most of it."

"You don't go on to the docks, then?" said Farley.

"Not if I know it," answered Jopley. "It is not in my line to lie outside for three or four hours while they are getting out a lot of Glasgow traders. Nor do I care for the ways of dock porters. As for the line of

trains from there, I think it is disgraceful the way they manage things."

"You mean from the Albert Docks?"

"I do. The first thing I do when I get ashore is to have a good English dinner—something solid, with roast beef and Yorkshire pudding in the *menu*. I reckon we shall be in about ten in the morning, which means that I shall have to take the missus to Rosherville Gardens."

"That will be a real treat," suggested Farley, grinning.

Jopley made a wry face and lit a cigar.

"I ain't over-sweet on plaster statues and stiffly-laid-out flower-beds," he said.

After a time the passengers went below one by one, some to try to get a little sleep, others to have a game at cards.

Now that Mudstone was in durance vile, there were no certain winners among them. They all played fair, and the hotel thief's little tricks were unknown among them.

Since his incarceration he had not often been seen. As he had to take some sort of exercise, he preferred to indulge in it late at night, and his whim had been humoured.

Inspector Banks was not unkind to his prisoners, especially when he had a very notorious one in his keeping.

He looked upon such as good samples of the articles he traded in.

Of the capture of Mudstone he was especially proud.

"Here is a man," he said, when speaking of him at the dinner-table shortly after the capture, "who has been well known for years as a notorious thief, and yet nobody could nobble him. We were always too soon or too late when we went for him. I wouldn't part with him for a bag of gold."

That night, as the steamer sped up the Channel, Mudstone was brought out as usual for exercise. Banks had him in charge, for he trusted no man with the care of such a slippery customer.

Jim and his chum Morse were the only other passengers on deck, neither being in the humour for sleep or the company of the card-players in the stuffy cabin.

Mudstone, as he came on deck with his hands manacled before him, cast a bitter glance towards the youths, who both looked away, from motives of delicacy.

It was not in their natures to do anything to add to the poignancy he felt in his position.

The wretched man paced up and down the deck, with the officer in charge of him walking carelessly by his side.

"It's a beautiful night," said Banks, amiably.

"Glad you think so," shortly replied Mudstone.

"All nights are the same to me now. What time do we get in to-morrow?"

"We shall be in London by ten or half-past."

"Will you charge me at once?"

"I shall just take you before the Bench and ask for a remand. We both want rest."

"Yes, I can do with a rest," muttered Mudstone, "and the longer it is the better. May I speak to those youngsters?"

"If you like," replied Banks, "but I won't promise you that they will give you an answer."

His request had been overheard, and the pair faced about. There was nothing in their faces to deter the prisoner from speaking.

"I owe to one or both of you something for being where I am," he said.

"You must owe it more to yourself," interposed Banks. "Don't talk rubbish."

"Well, I am not going to blame them. They did their duty. Neither liked me personally—I could see that; but they did not hesitate to be just, even when they thought you were a woman, confound you!"

Banks merely smiled. He was accustomed to little outbursts from his prisoners. It was no more to him than a playful kick from a colt is to the horse-breaker.

"They thought *you* were the thief—that you had robbed me," continued Mudstone, "and, in justice, made me acquainted with their suspicions. I wish to say that I do not bear them any malice, but thank them for what they did."

He paused and looked about him with heavy eyes. Jim fancied he saw a tear in one of them.

"No malice now," repeated Mudstone; "I thank them for it. By-and-by they will be glad to remember that I said as much with all the truth of a dying man."

Then, ere any of his listeners could realise his intentions, he had sprung forward, and half-leaped, half-tumbled himself over the side of the vessel into the sea.

One moment there was a silence, painful in its intensity, and then Banks shrieked out:

"Man overboard! Stop her!"

The first officer and the captain were both upon the bridge, for a quick passage up Channel is often accompanied by danger of running into some other vessel.

They heard the cry, and promptly the signal to stop the engines was sent down below.

But a vessel of the size of the "Fleetwing" cannot be immediately stopped, and she ploughed on a good three hundred yards ere she was brought to.

By that time a boat was ready, and immediately it was lowered, Banks and several of the crew sprang into her.

The seamen pulled back to the spot where the desperate Mudstone had plunged into the sea, the detective sitting in the stern looking for some indication of the man being afloat.

But it was a hopeless quest.

With his hands shackled, Mudstone went down to the bottom like a plummet, and would be seen no more until the sea gave up its dead.

Half an hour was passed rowing round and round vainly looking for the drowned man, and then the signal-whistle recalling the boat was heard.

So the men pulled back, and the boat being hoisted up, the "Fleetwing" proceeded on her way.

"I've heard it said," remarked the dejected Banks, "that Mudstone took a vow he would never spend a day in a shore-prison, and he has kept his word. It is a very serious loss for me."

CHAPTER CCCXXXVII.

MR. NAPOLEON FARRELL GIVES FINAL NOTICE OF ACTION.



THE shocking tragedy of the night was not known to the majority of the passengers until the following morning. To do them credit, they were all sorry to hear of Mudstone's untimely end.

"It was such a foolish thing to do," said Jopley. "At the most he would have got seven years, which means five and a half in limbo, and then he would have been free again. I can't understand the rashness of some people."

The "Fleetwing" was going up the river with a pilot on board, when the commercial gave vent to his common-sense view of the suicide. Half an hour later the anchor was dropped off Gravesend, and she was immediately boarded by sundry persons who had business with the captain, passengers, or crew.

Mrs. Jopley was there, up and dressed in her best, although it was not yet seven o'clock. She was a tall woman of thirty-eight, still good-looking, and with the air of a dashing milliner about her. Accompanying her was a small edition of Jopley, the hopeful heir of the family.

Mrs. Jopley took possession of her husband, and made him get into a boat without delay.

"You are not to be worried with anything," she said; "I'll see to your luggage."

She did, in a most business-like manner, and away they went to the shore.

Jim and Morse found that it had been arranged for them to go on to the docks, and their heavier trunks could not be got at.

"It is all part of the fun," said Jim, "and I told my people not to expect me until they saw me."

With so few passengers, about one-half landing at Gravesend, there was little delay, and the "Fleetwing" soon started again on her way.

On arriving at the docks they had to wait outside as usual while certain ships were released from their confinement, some with a cargo, others in ballast, and then about half-past ten o'clock they were taken in.

To Jim's amazement he discovered Mr. Farrell waiting on the quay for them. How he had ascertained they were due in the "Fleetwing" he could not so much as guess, but he afterwards learnt that his old schoolmaster had kept watch over every vessel that came from Spain, and seen their names in the passenger list, sent on by a fast mail-boat from Spain.

He was alone, looking much older. In appearance he would never see eighty again.

And the man was but a year or so over forty! It was quite painful to note the changes wrought in him during the past year or so.

"Now I wonder," said Jim, "what has brought him here?"

"Chance, perhaps," suggested Morse.

"I doubt it," said Jim.

When the ship was alongside, a sliding-way was fixed for the luggage, and a gangway for the passengers that were left. Jim and Morse, having seen all their belongings on deck, went below to attend the inspection in the adjoining custom-house.

As they touched the quay, Mr. Farrell, who was looking eagerly for them, advanced, with the aid of a stick, with a tottering step.

Jim half-held out his hand, but withdrew it when he discovered that the schoolmaster was not upon a friendly errand.

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a blue folded paper.

"This is a notice of injunction to restrain you from disposing of any of the effects you have brought or sent from Spain," he said.

"Indeed," drily responded Jim; "I know nothing of legal matters."

"You will find it to your advantage to show that paper to a solicitor," said Mr. Farrell.

"I want no lawyer," said Jim. "Does Mrs. Farrell know of it?"

"I am not in communication with Mrs. Farrell," replied the schoolmaster; "she has her views of matters, and I have mine."

Jim tore up the paper and tossed the pieces into the lock basin.

"You will never be a wise man, Mr. Farrell," he said.

"That act is a contempt of court," said Mr. Farrell, excitedly. "Are you mad?"

Jim returned no answer, but walked into the custom-house. Mr. Farrell seized Morse by the arm.

"You have the wiser head of the two," he said, in quavering tones; "you will not treat my legal action with contempt."

"We do not desire to treat you ill, Mr. Farrell," answered Morse, "but, really, you go too far. What can you do to stop us? We can dispose of our own property in spite of all you can do."

"I have had advice," said the schoolmaster, "from a lawyer, who is not at present in practice, it is true, having been unjustly removed from the rolls, but he is extremely well versed in all law matters. He says that I have sound cause for action, and must succeed. Here he is. He accompanied me hither."

He pointed to a shabbily-dressed man, with an extraordinarily red nose, who had been hovering near them, unseen by Morse.

"Mr. Stainer, solicitor," said Mr. Farrell by way of introduction.

The bibulous-looking party bowed. Morse took no notice of him whatever.

"You had better come with us," he said, "and have nothing to do with legal sharks, Mr. Farrell. You have your wife's address, I suppose?"

"She is living at Vale Cottage, Hampstead."

"Then let us go there as soon as our luggage is passed by the customs," advised Morse.

There was a peculiar weariness, combined with wildness, in the eyes of the schoolmaster that pained him exceedingly.

He felt nothing but sympathy for the man.

A look towards the astute Mr. Stainer obtained from that legal light a negative shake of the head. Morse put himself between them.

"Mr. Farrell," he said, "if you act as I wish, you will still find many friends. I will even go so far as to pay a *really respectable* lawyer to tell you how far you have a claim to the property, and will abide by his decision as far as I am concerned."

"Here! stop a moment!" said Mr. Stainer, loudly. "Do you mean to say, young man, that I am *not* respectable?"

"Not for a lawyer," said Morse, coolly.

This was a qualifying answer that exasperated the man.

"I will bring an action for libel against you!" he roared.

Jim came back at this moment, and, hearing this terrible threat, asked who he was and against whom was he going to bring the action.

"Against that young puppy there," said the lawyer.

AN ORIGINAL, THRILLING, & ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

By E. HARCOURT BURRAGE, Author of "The Lambs of Littlecote," etc.



"This is a notice of injunction to restrain you from disposing of any of the effects you have brought or sent from Spain," said Farrell.

"If you call him a puppy again," said Jim, "I will see if you can swim like a dog by pitching you into the docks."

"Don't exasperate him, Stainer," said Mr. Farrell, eagerly. "He will do it as soon as look at you. He is a most desperate character."

Very little notice was taken of them by other people around. There was too much noise, arising from the hurry and scurry of getting things down from aboard the ship. But at that moment one of the dock police, observing the angry face of the lawyer and the excited actions of Mr. Farrell, came forward to intervene.

"You men must not quarrel here," he said.

"We are not quarrelling," replied the lawyer, loftily. "I am a solicitor of the High Court of Chancery and the Court of Common Pleas——"

"Unjustly struck off the rolls," murmured Mr. Farrell.

"That is not to the point," said Mr. Stainer. "I am still qualified for giving advice, although not entitled to charge the usual fees. This gentleman, officer, is a client of mine. He is here to serve notice of application on these young men to restrain them from using or disposing of his property."

"Well," said the officer, "has he done it?"

"He has, but——"

"Then the pair of you clear out of the docks, or I will run you in."

"Do what?"

"Run you in," repeated the officer. "Sharp's the word. Cut it!"

"Gordon," whispered Farrell, "you were always kind-hearted to me. You will not see me expelled from the docks as if I were a common vagabond."

It was the very lowest form of cringing, but the physical and mental condition of the unhappy schoolmaster condoned it.

"Repudiate that fellow," said Jim, "and I will be your friend still."

Mr. Farrell thereupon turned about and told the officer, who was already urging on the lawyer with gentle pushes, that he had nothing to do with the fellow, who had merely attached himself to him.

"He is a noisy, blatant, drunken ass," he added.

"Well, may I——"

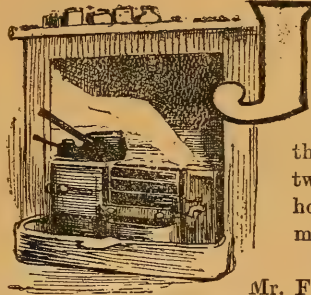
"On you go!" said the officer, cutting short the utterances of the surprised lawyer.

And Mr. Stainer, aware of the consequences of defying one in authority, beat an ignominious retreat.



CHAPTER CCCXXXVIII.

JIM HAS TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF.



JIM had said, "I have written to my friends not to expect me until they see me," therefore the matter of an hour or two spent ere he went home was not of serious moment.

He was bent on seeing Mr. Farrell restored to his wife, and he was also eager to see Eveline, to whom he had written but twice since he went to Seville, and sent his letters to the care of the agent at Haze's tourist-office.

"We can leave the luggage at Fenchurch Street Station," he said, "and go on straight to Hampstead."

Morse assented, and the schoolmaster was as a child in his hands. The tale of humiliation and submission was now complete.

"How was it," asked Morse, "that you did not go home with the agent?"

"I almost forget," mused Mr. Farrell. "He was such a didactic fellow, and one is at liberty to do as one pleases on British soil. I left him."

"And since then how have you lived?"

"Some kind, unknown friend, who obtained my address in some way that is a mystery to me, has sent me weekly a sum of money sufficient for my needs."

"How long have you known that man Stainer?"

"All the time I have been in England. He lodged in the same house as myself."

That was all he had to tell them beyond the fact that he believed he was personally an almost penniless man.

They arrived at Fenchurch Street, put away the luggage, and took a cab for Hampstead.

On the way thither Mr. Farrell fell into a fitful sleep, and talked a lot of incoherent nonsense about his life on the island. But it was always of the period when he was master there.

The cabman, on arriving at Hampstead, made inquiries for the house they were bound for, and ascertained that it was on the west side of the heath.

It proved to be a small cottage, standing in a garden of considerable dimensions. It was one of the old modest erections in that salubrious neighbourhood which have had to yield one by one to more pretentious erections for artists and moneyed families.

It was a surprise to find Miss Elegantine in the garden, removing weeds from a bed of late summer flowers. As the cab stopped she looked up, espied

Jim's face at the cab window, and uttered a little scream of delight.

"Now isn't it strange as a thing can be," she said, "that only last night I saw you in my dreams? You were being devoured by a wild beast with a Spanish man's head. I was sure you would be soon coming back, safe and sound, for dreams always go by contraries."

"Yours evidently did," responded Jim.

"Goodness me, young Morse," exclaimed Miss Elegantine, "and Mr. Farrell"—her back stiffened a bit—"where did you pick him up?"

"I wasn't picked up at all," replied Mr. Farrell, tartly; "I went to meet them at the docks."

"Well, I never!" was all Miss Elegantine could say.

It seemed that Mrs. Farrell and Eveline were out shopping, but might shortly be expected back. Jim paid the cabman, and they entered the cottage together.

"The place is very small," said Mr. Farrell, critically.

"It is smaller where there is none," said Miss Elegantine, sharply. "Bless you, Mr. Farrell, if you can find us a bigger house we shall be glad to move into it."

"I can provide nothing," was the sad reply, "for I have lost everything."

"Luckily," said Miss Elegantine, "your dear wife learnt, on coming home, that a distant relative had left her sufficient money to bring in three hundred a year."

"My dear wife," said the schoolmaster, "always had expectations. I can make myself contented here."

Miss Elegantine snorted in a quiet way, and turning to Jim and Morse, gave them such news of their old friends as she had to impart.

Terry, as his father had intimated, had gone abroad. He came to the cottage about a fortnight before, and left his address, which was to be given to Jim as soon as he returned.

"The poor boy was very vexed with you for not writing to him from Seville," said Miss Elegantine.

"I had little time for anything," Jim declared.

"Not with a lady to look after," said Miss Elegantine, nodding her head. "Eveline will make you give an account of your goings-on. Oscar is in a bank—sixty pounds a year, with a ten-pound annual rise. He doesn't want it in one way, but my motto is, 'Keep boys at work, and you keep them out of mischief.'"

"Quite right," said Jim.

Then she began to give him news of Trimmer, Dawson, and others, but was cut short by the click of the latch of the gate.

"Here they are," said Miss Elegantine, "and I only trust, Gordon, that you have a good, honest tale to tell."

CHAPTER CCCXXXIX.

"HAPPY HAMPSTEAD."



FOREMOST came Eveline, and seeing there were several persons in the room, paused by the doorway. Coming out of the strong light into the shadow, she did not at first recognise them. Jim approached her with outstretched hand,

and then she saw who it was.

"Mamma," she exclaimed, looking back, "it is Mr. Gordon."

Jim was staggered. He was quite unprepared to find himself "Mistered." Mrs. Farrell, hurriedly entering, grasped the hand he still mechanically held out, and kissed him on the cheek.

"Welcome, more than welcome," she cried, "and you too, Morse. Is that you, Nap?"

The schoolmaster, who had held back behind the younger arrivals, came forward and meekly acknowledged his identity.

"So you have come at last," said Mrs. Farrell.

"Well, have you anything to say for yourself?"

"Nothing, my dear, except that I ought to have come before."

It was plain that she had been prepared to find a great change in him, but, nevertheless, had to struggle to conceal how much she was shocked by the alteration in him.

Eveline, too, was looking at him in pained wonderment.

But they rallied, and, like the good creatures they were, gave him a welcome he hardly deserved. They were spared a true account of how and why he had met Jim and Morse at the dock. His declaration that he had seen their names in the passenger list, and gone down to meet them, sufficed. Mrs. Farrell retired to take off her bonnet and mantle. Eveline stole away into the garden, whither Jim followed her.

"A nice welcome you have given me," he said, dismally.

"Do you feel you deserve a better?" asked Eveline, looking keenly at him.

"Yes, I do."

"For three weeks you never sent me a line."

"For three weeks I lay wounded in bed. At one time it was thought I should die."

"Oh, Jim!"

"You could hardly expect a delirious fellow to write letters, I imagine?"

"How did it happen? Surely you did not get fighting a duel about a Spanish girl?"

"What Spanish girl? I saw a good many of them."

"You know what I mean. I am referring to the Senorita Toreomez, the most lovely girl in Spain."

"Who told you that?"

"You did. What a memory you must have! The exact words of your remark about her in the first letter I received are, 'Ximena, the Hidalgo's daughter, is considered the most beautiful of girls.'"

"I meant in Spain," said Jim, "there are more beautiful girls elsewhere."

"Have you found them?"

"I know one I like better. Eveline, have done with this nonsense about Ximena. She cared more for the little finger of Morse than for my whole self."

"You are sure of that?" said Eveline, hesitating.

"Ask Morse; he knows more about it than I do," replied Jim.

"Then I'm sorry for her," said Eveline, brightly "and Jim, I am very glad to see you again."

Then their peace was made, and they walked about the garden for the next twenty minutes as happy as two birds in the air.

They had so much to say to each other, that Miss Elegantine was at last entrusted with a message to let them know that luncheon was ready, and then they put aside private matters and joined their friends at table.

The only silent member of the party was Mr Farrell, who had all-sufficient reasons for being less joyous than the rest.

But the old assertive spirit was gone out of him, never to return.

Stainer, the beery solicitor, had been his last shot in his locker, and when fired it had missed its mark. Henceforth there was no more fight in him.

Like the great original from which he took his Christian name, he had found his St. Helena, and from thenceforth he would live in a solitude that was not without its advantages, for it gave him peace and rest.

The day was illustrative of "Happy Hampstead," as Londoners love to call it, although Jim and Morse did not indulge in the favourite sports of the usual frequenters of that salubrious spot.

It was not until the evening had come that they left the cottage, with a promise of returning at an early date.

"You will not be running back to Seville, I hope?" said Eveline. Womanlike, she could not forego a parting shot.

"Speaking for myself," said Jim, "certainly not. But I won't be responsible for Morse."

Morse simply smiled. He was not going to commit himself one way or the other.

Then in the twilight, arm in arm, the chums went

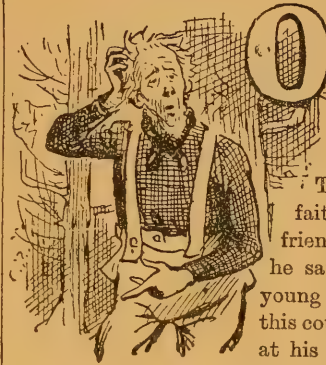
their way, and, with the aid of the prosaic bus, returned to Fenchurch Street for their luggage, and thence by cab they went on to Jim's home.

On the welcome there given to the young adventurer and his friend we need not dwell, but will briefly state that it was all they could desire.

The story of the Island School is practically ended, and it only now remains for us to gather up the few threads that are still hanging loose, and to indicate as far as we are able the probable fate of those who have figured prominently in these pages.

CHAPTER CCCXL.

CHARLEY IS PROVIDED FOR.



ON the following morning the first thing that came into Jim's mind was his old companion, Charley, the bear.

That he could keep his faithful four-footed friend constantly with him he saw was impossible. A young man walking abroad in this country with a tame bear at his heels would not only cause an embarrassing amount of attraction, but inevitably bring himself into collision with the authorities.

Nor could he think of leaving him at home, his friends not having the same romantic interest as he had in the creature. It would be useless to suggest it.

The question therefore was: What was to be done with Charley?

He thought the matter over until it was time to get up, and, while dressing, Morse came into his room, and they had a consultation on the subject. Finally they decided to see the agent and take his advice.

Accordingly, after breakfast, they started for the Strand to interview that worthy man in his office, where they expected to find him, and they were not disappointed.

He was very busy, of course—all agents always are, or profess to be, and he showed some slight signs of embarrassment when Charley was mentioned.

"The fact is," he said, "I could not quite keep my promise with you. I found it impossible to do any thing with him here. A better behaved bear never lived, but everybody was so unreasonably afraid of him, and moreover, he would not stop in any place of confinement such as I had at my disposal."

"I hope you have not had him killed," said Jim.

"No, of course not," replied the agent. "I did not want an action for damages, but I had a fine time of it. First of all, I thought I would take him home. Having no children of my own, I hoped my wife would take to him as a pet. But she fainted dead away the moment she saw Charley. It was awkward, for I took him home late at night to avoid his being seen by my neighbours. For one night only I had to put him up, so I placed him in our wood-cellar, which was almost empty."

The agent stopped, and rubbed his head in a serio-comic way, as if the memory of Charley's residence in his cellar had two sides to it.

"I told him to lie quiet," he went on, "but, bless you, he paid no heed to me. About one o'clock in the morning he made up his mind to come out, and just walked through the door and came upstairs. I was asleep and snoring, but my dear wife heard him. She screamed out, 'James, that bear is loose,' and then popped out of bed and got under it."

He laughed in a somewhat melancholy fashion as he recalled that embarrassing time. Jim and Morse did their best to look sympathetic, but it was something of a failure.

"I went to the beast," continued the agent, "and had to stand on the landing in my night-shirt, while Charley, on conciliation bent, went through his entire list of stock performances. They were not so interesting as I found them on the island."

"I should say they were not," gravely remarked Jim.

"Well, it ended in my going downstairs with him and trying to induce him to go to sleep in the cellar. But he would not, although he was willing enough to put up with the mat. But I thought of the servant-girl, when she came down in the morning and found him there. She is nervous, and goes off into hysterics on the slightest provocation. The mat would not do, and it ended in my having to sit up with the creature all night in our back-parlour."

"I am very sorry," said Jim.

"Oh, it is nothing now it is over," replied the agent, "but I assure you that at the time I considered it was a night of nights. The next day I stayed at home until a wire came for me from the office. A gentleman who was forming a private menagerie wanted my advice about where to get the animals he wanted. To me that summons seemed a providential piece of good fortune. I wired for him to come up to me, as I had something to show him.

"Now, don't be angry," continued the agent, "for I did the best I could. If I had not temporarily disposed of Charley, he would either have driven me mad or been shot out of the way. The name of the gentleman is Sir Thomas Greenstraw, and he has Charley at

his place in Kent in a cage as big as a small garden. It was fitted up for a bear, with trees to climb and a cave to cool off in, and I assure you that your old friend is perfectly happy. But you can claim him again any moment you like."

"He does not grieve for me?" said Jim.

"I was down at Sir Thomas's place only last Saturday, and talk of grieving, you would laugh at the idea, if you saw your Charley. He is allowed out, and gets what I may call two days in the week for roaming about the park. But he does not go far away. He is too fond of Sir Thomas's children."

"Oh, there are children?" said Jim.

"Three boys—five, seven, and nine—and they ride together on Charley's back. I give you my word that I am not romancing. You will do well if you leave him there."

Morse was of the same opinion. The manner of the agent showed that he was speaking the simple truth, and such being the case, it was the better thing to do.

After all these months, Charley, if he had not forgotten his old friends, must have ceased to pine for them, and he certainly had been fortunate in finding new ones.

"I shall let him be," said Jim, "and I thank you for having done the best possible thing. As for the expenses——"

"All paid by Mr. Terry, who has been arranging for you to dispose of your property acquired on the island. Neither of you need ever work again."

And the agent sighed as he thought of the long years of toil still ahead of himself.

"I shall not be disposed in any case to lie idle," said Jim. "Well, we will not detain you any longer from business——"

"Stop a moment," said the agent. "Have you seen the morning paper?"

"No," replied Morse.

"There is something in it that may interest you. Your old friend Chorker is in trouble."

"With the police?"

"Yes; but not for theft or murder. He has simply been cracking a police sergeant over the cranium with his crutch."

"Is he lame?" asked Morse.

"Not he; but he chose to get himself up with a bent leg and a sling, and sweep a crossing at St. John's Wood on Sunday morning, near the church, I believe."

"A crossing?" exclaimed Jim.

"He has got rid of his little all," said the agent, "and come down to that. But it seems that he was not wanted where he had pitched his tent, in a manner of speaking; so the police had orders to move him on. A sergeant waited on him, and, finding expostulation thrown away, was going to run him in, when he hit

him. He was remanded for inquiries to be made into his state of mind, and will be brought up at Marlborough Street this morning."

"What time?" asked Jim.

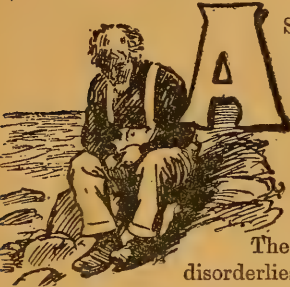
The agent referred to his watch.

"The usual drunks and disorderlies," he said, "are now on. They will be about over, if you take a cab at once, when you arrive. I reckon Chorker will be put into the dock immediately afterwards."

Both were desirous of seeing their old friend in his new rôle, and having again thanked the agent for all the trouble he had taken on their behalf, they left the office.

CHAPTER CCCXLI.

CHORKER AND MANY OTHER THINGS ARE DISPOSED OF.



A SMART hansom conveyed Morse and Jim to Marlborough Street, where, with the aid of a friendly policeman, they obtained seats in that part of the court set aside for witnesses.

The last of the "drunks and disorderlies" was being disposed of, in the person of an old lady without a bonnet, who solemnly vowed she had never been there before, but on twenty-seven previous convictions being proved against her, more solemnly still vowed that she would never come there again.

A fine of ten shillings or fourteen days' hard labour having been imposed, she informed the presiding magistrate that his head was worth something less than an addled egg, and addressing the gaoler by the name of "Lively Tommy," bade him escort her downstairs and see that she had some gruel, warm and sweet, as soon as possible.

The hilarity of the spectators in the public part of the court having subsided, a policeman laid a crutch and a short wooden leg on the solicitor's table, as the original Chorker was ushered into the dock.

As he belonged to the order of men who go through life without any material change in their personal appearance, no change was to be seen in him, save that his face had an expression of outraged haughtiness upon it.

"I suppose I can have a cheer to sit on?" were the first words he uttered.

"No, you can't," replied the gaoler; "and you keep as quiet as you can, or you'll yet it warm."

"Somebody will suffer for all this," said Chorker, as he stood up to the rails.

A solicitor, employed by the authorities, rose up to state the case. It was practically what the agent had declared it to be, with the addendum that the prisoner had been examined by a doctor, who had discovered that, "although possessed of a low order of intellect, and extremely ignorant, he was not by any means insane."

"I protest against them 'ere insinuations," said Chorker.

"Why don't you dry up?" said the gaoler, in an undertone.

"Is there any truth in the statement," said the magistrate, referring to some papers before him, "made by the prisoner on his last appearance here, in his assertion that he has served as a general in the Spanish army?"

"None at all, your worship," was the prompt reply.

"I fo't for the Spani'rds," said Chorker, "and was app'inted ginerall by the governor of Minorca. But if you don't want to believe, you won't, and there is an end of—"

He stopped short, for he had suddenly espied Morse and Jim seated in the witness reserve seats. If they had been ghosts risen from the grave he could not have been more staggered.

"Go on," said the magistrate. "Have you any witness to character to call?"

"I can speak on that matter, your worship," said Jim, rising.

"Don't hear him!" groaned Chorker.

A police officer pointed to the witness-box, and Jim stepped into it.

"You know the prisoner?" said the prosecuting solicitor,

"I do," replied Jim; "he was at Fermentera when I was a pupil at a school there."

"Is he a Spanish general, or governor, as he has also declared himself to be?"

"He was appointed governor of Fermentera, but it was done in jest."

"Did he believe it was done in earnest?"

"He did. And it is a very hard matter to undeceive him on any point in which he thinks he is right."

"His intellect is of a low order?"

"Very."

"Is he a dangerous character?"

"Not by any means. I do not think a child need be afraid of him. He is an arrant coward. I cannot believe he has seriously injured anyone."

"Is the officer seriously injured?" inquired the magistrate.

"Not at all, sir," replied the officer from the body of the court.

"You are a friend of his?" he said to Jim.

"No, your worship, save that I know him, and wish

to help him out of a position his folly has thrown him into."

"Well, a pound or fourteen days," said the magistrate, and Jim paid the money.

So Chorker was released, so much astonished to find that Jim did not do his best to add to his trouble, that he made no effort to leave the dock until "Lively Tommy," in the sternest of tones, asked him if he meant to sleep there.

Outside the court he found the two friends awaiting him. He was about to profusely express his gratitude, when Jim cut him short.

"As one with whom we were associated, not always in a manner creditable to you, Chorker," he said, "I have helped you to-day, and, letting bygones be bygones, we will help you a little further if you are really disposed to work."

"I could git a livin', sir," said Chorker, humbly, "if I had a barrer and a couple of pounds to start with."

"You must have had some money and money's worth when you came to England. How is it that you are so poor?"

"I sold iverything I had, sir, and realised a goodish sum. In the freedom of my 'art I treated a party, and he hocussed me. W'en I come round iverything was gone, and I ain't seen him since."

For once Chorker had spoken the truth. The very simplicity of the story confirmed it. And neither of his listeners was disposed to be hard upon him.

"You shall have another start in life," said Jim; "but, remember, it will be your last."

Then he gave Chorker his address, and a few shillings to keep him until he could get that start, and left him.

"The worst on it," said Chorker, as he gazed after them, slowly mopping his forehead with his handkerchief—"and there is a worst side in all things I have to do with—is that them two are so s'perior that they makes a man like me feel unkimmonly small. But they are good fellows, and I'll try to run straight in the futur'. I don't know but what being a coster at home will be better than being governor of that 'ere blessed island."

It will suffice for a final word concerning Chorker to say that he became as good as here and there a coster. In the matter of giving weight, the correct weight, he wanted looking after; but that is a weakness not confined to dealers who do their trading from a barrow. Shopkeepers, big and little, are occasionally found guilty of giving less than they ought for money.



CHAPTER CCCXLII.

A CURIOUS INQUIRER TURNS UP.—A HITCH IN MATTERS OF THE ISLAND TREASURE.



ALTHOUGH Mr. Terry had been busy in endeavouring to effect a sale of the many treasures brought from the island, he had not completed any of the business. A letter from him invited Jim and Morse to come over and have a talk about the matter.

There was something in it not entirely satisfactory—one sentence, for instance, that ran thus: "Schaffer, a dealer in the antique, at first disposed to rush at the purchase of some of the things, now hangs fire. He asks a good many questions."

"Bother his questions!" said Jim, as he read the letter aloud to Morse. "What does it matter to him where the things came from?"

"He may fancy all sorts of things," replied Morse, "or have heard something prejudicial."

"From whom?"

"Farrell is one of those persistent fellows who is never entirely beaten into the straight track."

"I can't think Farrell would be such a fool," said Jim, emphatically shaking his head, "as to go on with his hanky-panky tricks. He is once more provided for, and assuredly would not risk offending his wife again."

"I wouldn't be so sure of that," said Morse.

The letter made a private appointment with the two friends and Mr. Terry. The place of meeting was the top of St. Martin's Lane, and the hour twelve. Punctual to a minute the friends turned up, and Mr. Terry was with them shortly afterwards.

"I promised to call on Schaffer at half-past twelve," said Mr. Terry; "his place is not far from here. We are not going to his shop, but to his private office."

He led the way to a by-street in the locality between Drury Lane and the Seven Dials. It was as dirty a street as need be, and no dealer above an old-clothes man resided there, with the exception of Schaffer, the largest buyer and seller of curios in London.

He was in his office on the ground-floor of one of the poorest-looking of the poor houses, talking to a young Jew, who was more shabby and dirty than the house.

"Perhaps we had better come again in a quarter of an hour," said Jim.

"No need to go away," said Schaffer, who spoke with a slight German accent. "I am only giving a few instructions to my son."

His son stared at Jim and Morse as if they had

been curios brought there for sale. It was their cleanliness and general smartness he was interested in. But he took no further notice of their presence.

"Mind this," said Schaffer, by way of final instructions to his precious offspring, "you are not to join in the knockout, but to go for the things on your own. The others will then think that you are buying for yourself, and as they know you to be a fool and no judge, they will let you have them cheap."

"Not if they are judges," said his son.

"They are of some things, but not of these. There is only one set in the world, and I'm the only man who has seen them in this country. I led them to think they were duplicates. Now go. Get them at any price, if you can't land them cheap."

His son nodded, stared again at Jim and Morse, and vanished.

"In business," said Schaffer, with a sigh, "we have to see that none of our brother dealers get the pull of us."

Jim was of opinion that a "pull" as he termed it, was being worked by himself; but not knowing its nature, or feeling it was a personal one, he thought no more about it.

There were three chairs, all of the poorest make, and much the worse for wear, on which they were invited to sit down.

When they had settled themselves in an uneven row in front of the dealer, he looked from one to the other keenly, and then addressing Mr. Terry, asked:

"Are these the young gentlemen you spoke of?"

"They are," was the reply.

"The finders of the curios on some island?"

"Yes."

"And they are not disposed to name the island?"

"They do not consider it necessary," said Mr. Terry.

"But I do," said Schaffer, coolly. "How am I to tell that these things have not been stolen from a private home collection?"

Jim half-rose from his seat, and his face flushed. Schaffer held up his hand.

"My young friend," he said, "do not be offended. I merely asked the name of the island as a precaution. It would never do for me to openly offer things for sale with the prospect of being sued for unlawful possession of them. There is not the slightest occasion for you to give way to indignation."

"I won't," said Jim; "but the things are rightfully ours, and if you do not buy them——"

"No other man in the country will," interposed the dealer, calmly. "They will ask if you have been to me, and if you say you have not, they will come to me to ask if it so. If I refuse to deal with you, no other man will, except at a ridiculously low figure."

Jim looked at Mr. Terry, and saw by his face that the man was speaking the truth.

"The things you offer," continued Schaffer, "are quite out of the ordinary line. There is nothing like them in the market, and so much depends on their historical value."

"What do you mean?" asked Jim.

"Why, it is necessary for me to know what nation or people they originally belonged to," answered Schaffer.

"No living man could, in my opinion, make certain of their identity," said Morse, quietly. "I assume it would not be suggested that they are of modern manufacture?"

Mr. Schaffer shrugged his shoulders.

"They can in these days manufacture anything," he said, "even mummies, so that you could not swear they were not a thousand years old."

"How long can you give us to consider this matter?" asked Jim.

"A week, if you like; but in the meantime you will not hawk the things about elsewhere I suppose?"

"No, of course not."

"If you do that, I have done with them. Well, gentlemen, we now understand each other. Within a week I shall expect an answer one way or the other."

He shook hands with them, and as they were going out, a knock was heard at the door. The curio-dealer sprang up and opened it.

"Not now," he said, hurriedly; "in an hour's time."

"Very well," replied the visitor, as he shuffled away.

Mr. Schaffer detained his visitors for a few seconds, ostensibly to impress upon them the need of caution, but he did not deceive the two younger ones. Both understood that he was giving his last caller an opportunity to get out of the way before they emerged into the street.

They left him, and hurried out. A glance up and down revealed no familiar object or living person they knew. There were the usual dirty little boys playing about, the inevitable mongrel dog prowling for food, a few poorly-attired men and women, with seemingly nothing to do but to walk about and look wretched—but nothing more.

"Who was it?" asked Morse.

"I half-recognised the voice," answered Jim. "It certainly was not Farrell."

"Oh, no; not a bit like his voice."

"You are speaking of the man Schaffer spoke to at the door?" said Mr. Terry.

"We were," answered Jim, "and I for one feel certain that he is in some way interfering with our business."

They puzzled their minds all the way home, endeavouring to call back the voice, but neither Jim nor Morse could do so. It was strangely familiar, but for the life of them they could not say who the speaker was.

"It was the voice of a fairly-educated man," said Mr. Terry; "a little husky, but the tone was good."

"Could a boy assume such a voice?" asked Morse.

"Some boys are clever enough to do anything."

But if a boy, who even then could it be, unless it proved to be one of their schoolfellows?

But there was not one of them on whom they could conscientiously fix a charge of treachery. They were completely mystified.

The objections of Schaffer appeared to be entirely confined to the curios. With regard to the diamonds of Oka Wallah, there seemed little doubt but they would be disposed of without much trouble. They were the sole property of Morse, and he decided to put them in the market as soon as possible.

"Nobody knows but that there may be a hubbub over the other things," he said, grimly, "and it will be as well to realise what we can."

"The diamonds are yours," said Jim, "and I won't touch a penny of the proceeds."

"Stuff! You shall have your share."

"I assure you I won't so much as look at it."

"I will run over to Hatton Garden and see one of the diamond-dealers there. I had better take a sample stone. Perhaps I had better go this afternoon."

He did so, but by five o'clock he was with the youngsters again, with a face longer than ever.

"Somebody is working against us," he said. "The very first dealer I saw—a man reputed not to be over-scrupulous in his dealings—coolly told me that he had been warned not to deal in anything from me, or either of you boys, and he would not purchase a single diamond until I had furnished him with its pedigree and the name of the original possessor, prior to your getting hold of it."

"And what does that mean?" asked Jim.

"Oh, he suspects the stones to have been stolen," replied Mr. Terry.

"Where from?" asked Morse, irritably.

"Just the question I put to him," said Mr. Terry, "and his answer was that the stones may have been taken from the treasury of some Eastern potentate, who has not yet had time to discover his loss. He declared that the one I showed him was altogether too fine to be ranked among ordinary jewels."

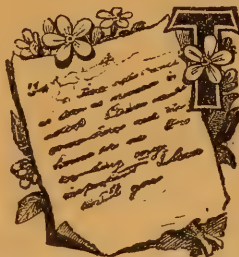
"Is there no other market?" asked Jim.

"We might try the regular jewellers, but as the majority of them only exhibit stock provided by the Hatton Garden men, and virtually sell on commission, I think there is very little chance of doing business there."

Having thus expressed his opinion, Mr. Terry handed the diamond back to Morse, and left them to look after his own affairs.

CHAPTER CCCXLIII.

A MYSTERIOUS LETTER.—JIM UNDERTAKES TO MEET THE WRITER.—A VERY STRANGE STIPULATION.



THE following day Jim received the most mysterious letter he had ever read. It was in a feigned handwriting:

"SIR,—If you wish to have a free hand in dealing with certain articles in your possession, you have only to pay a reasonable sum for the privilege, and the thing will be as good as done. I can be heard of at the 'Green Man' public house, in Gorman Street West. Come any time between seven and eight in the evening, and walk into the right-hand compartment of the bar. All you have to do is to come alone and say nothing until a certain party comes in and speaks to you. He will lead you to where I may be spoken to. Bring no valuables with you. I suggest this to show you that no robbery is intended. Also you may have a shooter, which you know how to use, and never without discretion. Let only one other person know if you come—your friend and helper, Morse.

"CAPTAIN DARK."

Jim read this letter through and through, and wondered. The writer, whoever he was, knew something, but whether it was worth buying Jim could not tell until he had ascertained what it was.

It was a great nuisance that there should be any bother at all, and he asked himself, if any were made, would it be fatal to his claim and that of his friends to that which they had honestly won?

Mr. Terry was of opinion that there was. When a Government claims a thing, especially if that Government is a needy one, it was not particular as to the methods by which it worked to gain its end.

And behind every needy Government there are always a gang of aristocratic harpies and hangers-on who are bent on doing something for themselves. Sometimes they are open to be bribed; on other occasions they do not stick at a bit of juggling, making false claims on behalf of the authorities, and fairly worrying helpless people to pay them for helping to settle the matter which they have set going.

He suspected there was a Spaniard behind this business, but who it was he could not guess.

It was not the Hidalgo Toreomez, for he was high above any tricks of that description, but it was possible he might have indiscreetly talked of the doings on the island, and set to work a fellow-countryman not so scrupulously honourable.

That was the conclusion Jim came to, but Morse was not of the same opinion. He said it was an English affair from the beginning, and might have been started by one of the officers of the "Victor."

"He may have overheard the boys talking," said

Morse. "It was not possible to keep them all so quiet as they ought to have been."

"I shall go to meet this fellow," said Jim, "as far as the 'Green Man,' anyway."

"I think I should leave him alone," said Morse. "On my word, I fancy it is a plant on us by Schaffer from beginning to end."

"What can be his idea?"

"Thinks we stole the things, and hopes to frighten us into selling them cheap."

"He would never buy stolen goods," said Jim, emphatically. "He is too well known and too high up in his calling."

It was decided that Jim should go that very night to the "Green Man." Morse thought of following him, but Jim said it would not do. He was convinced that no personal injury to him was intended.

As the hour of seven drew near, he took a cab and rode off to Gorman Street West. The "Green Man" needed no seeking, for it was a very prominent public-house, conducted on the most approved respectable lines.

All its fittings were modern, and the various boxes or compartments completely surrounded the bar, which was egg-shaped, and looked very much like a small circus squeezed out of form.

He entered the right-hand compartment, and ordered a light drink. Only one other man was there, seated at the far end, and apparently killing time by dozing it away. At his elbow was a small spirit-glass, recently emptied.

The man was poorly clad in the dingy black clothes one involuntarily associates with men in possession, badly paid lawyers' clerks, and so forth. He was about forty years of age, and had undoubtedly devoted a considerable portion of his manhood to the worship of Bacchus.

Shortly after Jim's arrival this man slowly opened his eyes and stared at his empty glass in a melancholy manner. Then, as he felt in his pocket for a coin, which possibly was not there, he looked about the compartment, and saw Jim.

The light of intelligent recognition flashed into the fellow's eyes. The sight of Jim recalled him to a task he had temporarily forgotten.

Abandoning the search for money, he rose up, and stepped down close to Jim.

"You've come, sir," he said, in a low tone.

"Yes," answered Jim, eyeing the speaker with no great favour; "I am here. Is it you I have to see?"

"You see me," said the fellow, with a smile at his own poor humour. "But I am not the party who has to talk to you. I can take you to him."

"Very well; I am ready," said Jim.

"Afore you go," said the man, with a sly look, "what do you say to just one together?"

"One what?"

"A drink—only one. I takes a drop now and then for my 'ealth's sake. I find that Old Tom agrees with me as well as anything."

"I need nothing," said Jim, "but I won't hinder you from having a drink."

"And as I've come out with nothing less than gold about me," said the man, with a cunning leer, "you will not mind paying for it, perhaps?"

Jim put a shilling down, and walked to the door of the compartment. The fellow, with another cunning grin, quietly ordered a double dose of gin neat, tossed it off, and picked up the change the barman carelessly threw upon the counter.

Seeing that Jim was not looking towards him, he in an absent-minded manner, dropped the change into his pocket, and declared he was ready.

Shuffling hastily out of the public-house, he led the way round to a court, which was so dark that it was like the yawning mouth of a cavern.

"Don't be afraid, sir," said the guide.

"I am not afraid," answered Jim; "but at the first sign of trickery—I shoot."

"Mind the thing don't go off accidentally," was the anxious rejoinder.

Jim laughed softly, and said:

"When I fire somebody has to go down."

Once well inside, the gloom was not so deep as it first appeared to be. There was an amount of reflected light from the street that dimly showed the interior of the court. It was not very deep, and, at the most, contained half a dozen houses, all of the dingiest and the poorest. There was not a light visible at any of the windows.

"In here," said the guide, opening the second door on the left.

"Are you going in?" asked Jim.

"My duty ends here," was the answer.

He was such a miserable creature that Jim did not fear any violence from him personally. The danger lay in his possibly being an agent for others.

"Come in," said somebody inside; "first floor—front."

"That voice again," thought Jim. It was the voice he had heard at Schaffer's.

Somehow it conveyed to him that the speaker was not a dangerous man. So he entered the house, and groped his way to the first-floor front room. The door was open.

He tried in vain to penetrate the darkness before him. He could see nothing, but he boldly entered. Then came the final tax upon his courage.

"Close the door," said the mysterious unknown. "What we have to say must not be overheard."

Jim did hesitate the fraction of a second, but he closed the door, and advanced a pace or two.

"You are a bold lad," said the unseen man.

"It is nothing," replied Jim. "I have had to do with many things worse than this. Now to business. What do you want with me?"

"You have returned to this country," said the unknown, "with a number of very valuable things you wish to sell."

"It is so," briefly replied Jim.

"And you have generously shared much of the property with your schoolfellows?"

"They have their rightful share. I am not entitled to the sole possession."

"A hitch has occurred in the matter of the sale?" continued the unknown.

"Which originated in you, I believe," answered Jim.

"Well, it may be so, but in any case I can remove all obstacles—at a price."

"What is it you want?"

"A thousand pounds."

"You won't get it," said Jim, "nor anything like that sum."

"What will you give?" asked the other, after a moment's pause.

"A hundred pounds," answered Jim, "and that will only be paid after the sale is completed."

"That won't do for me."

"You will not take my word?"

"I can't. I dare not."

"And yet," said Jim, scornfully, "you would have me take yours. How do I know that all your boasted power is not a lie? Stand still!"

"What are you going to do?" asked the other, in a terrified tone.

"To shoot, if you do not keep still," said Jim, calmly. "I have brought the means of getting a light, and I mean to know who you are."

He had brought with him some of the long wax matches, occasionally used for the purpose of melting wax for seals. As he spoke he struck one on the wall, and held it aloft.

The room was a bare one, not a vestige of furniture in it. At the far end stood a man with his hands before his face, but with the fingers divided so that he could see between them.

"Hands down or up, which you like," said Jim, "or I will fire."

"You would never dare," was the quivering reply.

"Keep your hands there ten seconds and try me," returned Jim. "You will remember that I have been lured here by a man who has vanished, and have I not good reason to fear your violence? Shooting you down in my own defence would not be murder."

"What nonsense you talk!" muttered the other.

"About eight seconds gone," said Jim.

The hands dropped, and the face of Stainer was

revealed. Then Jim understood why the voice had been familiar to him without his being able to fix on the man.

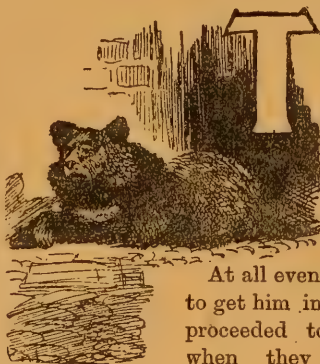
"So," said Jim, "you are the rascal who is interfering with us. Come out, and I will talk to you elsewhere."

As he spoke he threw open the door, and motioned for Stainer to go out first. A gentle shake of the revolver stimulated his movements, and with all speed he hastened into the court.

"Go on to the street," said Jim, "and make your way to the outside of the 'Green Man.' I'll talk to you there."

CHAPTER CCCXLIV.

STAINER SHOWS HIS TEETH.—YOUNG SCHAFFER COMES OUT STRONG.—MR. FARRELL IS WANTED AGAIN.



THE lawyer shuffled along like a whipped dog. All his schemes to hide his identity had been brought to naught by a resolute boy. But he still had a card to play.

At all events he had done nothing to get him into trouble, a fact he proceeded to impress upon Jim when they halted outside the public-house.

"It is you who threatened me," he said. "I said nothing criminal to you."

"Well, now that we are on better ground," said Jim, "let me once more ask you if you will accept my terms?"

Stainer hesitated. It appeared to him that Jim was weakening, and he could therefore act on stronger lines.

"Um!" he muttered; "a hundred pounds is not much."

"I should fancy it is a great deal to you," said Jim. "But to come to the point: you will get that sum and no more, at the very most. Will you accept it?"

"I really——"

"Take a night to think of it," said Jim, "and write to me one way or the other. Good-night!"

"Stop a moment," said Stainer. "I have come out without any money. Lend me a sovereign."

Jim brought out the coin and handed it to him, then hastened away at a smart pace and speedily vanished.

Stainer entered the "Green Man," wending his way to the compartment where Jim had met his guide.

The man was there drinking with a young fellow of Jewish cast of countenance and undersized in figure. He was barely five feet high, but so broad about the shoulders that he looked shorter than he really was.

"Well," he said, as he looked at Stainer's face, wet with perspiration, "you seem to have had a tough job."

"He is a young fiend," growled Stainer; "you can't scare him. He is not to be had on the rush."

He gave an account of the interview, merely making himself to appear in the light of a man who had not been intimidated, but yielded as a matter of policy.

"It was no use wrangling with him, was it, young Schaffer?" he said.

"Not for you to do it," replied the young Jew; "and I'll thank you not to be so free with my name in places like this. My governor would rile up if he knew I had fallen into such company as yours."

"I am by profession a solicitor," said Stainer.

"With the addition of being struck off the rolls," added young Schaffer. "Now do you want Bilby any more?"

Bilby was the guide. Stainer curtly said he could go home and do what he liked when he got there.

"I've come down to fourpenny beds," said Bilby, "and I want the money for that."

"I haven't a penny," asserted Stainer.

"That's a lie. You bled the youngster for a sovereign," said Bilby. "I saw you do it through the opening between the door. You let me have five shillings, or I may spoil your game."

"Do you dare to threaten me?" demanded Stainer.

"Yes," replied Bilby, calmly; "and to carry out my threats if I am pushed to it."

"Well, then, since you are so beastly vicious," rejoined Stainer, lamely, "there's your money; but if ever I get into practice again you won't be my clerk."

"I shall have to wait a long time for a berth if I don't get one till you are in practice again," said Bilby. "You are more likely to get engaged in business at Portland."

With this parting shot Bilby nodded to young Schaffer, and retired. Stainer sat down on one of the high stools in the bar and ordered a drink.

"Fancy that fellow turning on me," he said.

"Anyone would turn on you," said young Schaffer. "Suppose that Gordon goes to the governor and tell him that you are trying to blackmail him. He won't be at all riled, will he?"

"As much so with you as with me," said Schaffer; "and it was you who started the double game."

"It was you who came to the governor and told him there was something queer about the stuff. He wouldn't mind that if he could get it at his own price. But he doesn't know what it is. Why don't you tell him?"

"Yes, and then he would laugh at me," said Stainer. "I know him. He'll pay if he's obliged to."

"Sometimes," said young Schaffer, eyeing him closely, "I think that you don't know what is the matter yourself."

Stainer endeavoured to look indignant, but the effort was a failure. Young Schaffer came of a keen family, and he realised the truth.

"You know nothing," he said. "It is all a bit of bluff."

"Is it? Why did young Gordon trouble to come and see me? Why does he offer a hundred pounds?"

"Can't say. All I assert is that you know nothing."

"But I know a fellow who does—a man who was with the boys when the stuff was found."

"Did he say where it was?"

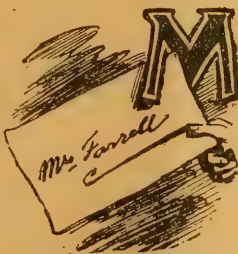
"No. He was mighty close over that, but I think it can be screwed out of him. His name is Farrell, and he is living up at North End—Hampstead way—with his wife."

"Drop him a line to-night and say that we will call on him in the morning," said young Schaffer. "If we are to make anything apart from the governor, who is so beastly close with me in money matters, it must be done quickly."

They borrowed a piece of paper and envelope from the barmaid, and a curt note was penned to the effect that on the morrow they would call and see Mr. Farrell. The hour of noon was named.

CHAPTER CCCXLV.

INTIMIDATING MR. FARRELL.—HIS STORY OF THE WEALTH OF THE BOYS.—STAINER AND YOUNG SCHAFFER PLAY AN ARTFUL CARD.



MR. NAPOLEON FARRELL was having his breakfast in bed on the following morning, when Eveline brought him up a letter. It was a dirty, dingy envelope that excited her disgust.

"My dear father," she said, "this looks as if it came from some low acquaintance you have formed. I hope you will have nothing more to do with them."

"You may trust me, my dear," he replied. "I dare say it is nothing more than a begging letter from some poor person in the neighbourhood."

Eveline left the letter lying on the bed and retired. Mr. Farrell complacently went on with his breakfast. Since his final reconciliation with his wife he had fallen upon pleasant times.

Breakfasts in bed to an invalid gentleman are very enjoyable, and when they are supplemented with

absolute ease and freedom all day, what more could be desired?

He considered that henceforth his life was to be a peaceful dream, but from this delusion he was speedily awakened by the letter, which he read as follows:

"Two of my best friends will call on you to-morrow about eleven o'clock.—STAINER."

"Two of my best friends," muttered Mr. Farrell. "I don't want to know them. Why can't they leave me in peace?"

Instead of wisely naming the matter to his wife, he weakly hid it from her. As for the men coming to the house, that must be prevented at any cost. So about half an hour before the time he went out for a walk, and hovered in the neighbourhood of his home, until he saw the two precious schemers sauntering up from the more densely populated part of Hampstead.

"Hallo, Farrell!" cried Stainer, "how goes it?"

"I wish you to clearly understand that whatever it is, it will go better without you," said the schoolmaster. "Why do you come here to annoy me?"

"Why, I've only come round for a chat," exclaimed Stainer, with a stare of surprise. "A friend of mine—Mr. Schaffer, junior—whose father is the richest dealer in *bric-à-brac* in London."

Generally, any reference to rich men deeply impressed Mr. Farrell, but on this occasion he was not moved a bit. He could hardly conceive a young man of Schaffer junior's appearance to be in possession of a rich father; he therefore contented himself with a distant and semi-incredulous bow.

The extended hand of young Schaffer was not grasped; but he exhibited no signs of being offended. It would not have been prudent.

"I was telling him in a casual way," said Stainer, "about your boys. Like me, he considered it a wonderful story."

"It is a wonderful story," said Mr. Farrell.

"They discovered a vast amount in some place—let me see—did you name——" Stainer paused for a reply.

"I did not," answered Mr. Farrell.

"Anyway, they discovered things of great value."

"They did."

"Have you ever estimated their full worth?"

"I should say," said Mr. Farrell, after a moment's thought, "that you might put it down at a million."

"A million!" gasped young Schaffer.

Mr. Farrell nodded in a curt, quiet way, as if he had all his life been mixed up with boys who found treasure that ran into millions.

"And they brought it all away?" said Stainer, meditatively.

"Not a quarter of it," said Mr. Farrell, his mind reverting to the vast amount of precious stones that

had been left in the region of the cascades in the cave.

"Then there is enough left to make it worth the while of others to seek it?" said young Schaffer.

"Undoubtedly," answered Mr. Farrell.

"Why, then, do you not seek it?"

"I have enough and to spare for my needs. I am not greedy."

"Now look here, Mr. Farrell," said young Schaffer, "if you don't care to try your luck, you might give the tip to your friends."

"I have not the slightest objection, if they are friends," answered the schoolmaster.

"Surely!" pleaded Stainer, "you look upon *me* as a friend?"

"I assure you, I do not," said Mr. Farrell. "You are a mere acquaintance I picked up at a time when—when I was awaiting the return of my family from abroad. I have now settled down into a quiet life, and have no desire for our brief connection to be extended."

This was a hard knock for the two schemers, but young Schaffer promptly went upon another tack. All his life where persuasion had failed, he tried bullying, very often with success.

"Now, look here," he said, "we have reason to believe that there is something wrong about this treasure, and unless you out with the truth, you stand a good chance of getting into trouble with the rest. If you tell us all you know, whatever happens, you will be let off scot-free."

Mr. Farrell was alarmed. He showed it in his face, and young Schaffer felt, in his own expressive way of thinking, that "he had hooked his fish."

"And the sooner it is out, the better," he added.

"I can't tell you anything now," said Mr. Farrell, leisurely; "I must have time to think it over. For a long time I went against the boys, talked to them, reasoned with them, threatened them, and everything went against me——"

"You should have thrashed them," remarked Stainer.

"Would you like to try it on?" demanded Mr. Farrell; "if so, I know two or three of them who could give back as much as you give, with ample interest. No, they are beyond thrashing. You can't beat that Gordon and Morse in particular; one would make mincemeat of you, and the other, with a pinch of powder of his own making, would blow you to atoms. He is one of the cleverest chemists in the world, young as he is."

Stainer had already tried his hand with Jim Gordon, and come out second best. He had no desire to try conclusions with him a second time. Morse he knew very little of, but thought it probable the schoolmaster was speaking the truth.

"Well," he said, "all you have to do is to give us the information we require, and we can find people to handle the case. If we do not hear from you tomorrow, we must place the whole matter in the hands of the police."

"Very well," said Mr. Farrell, wearily, "I can't talk to you any more now. Good-day."

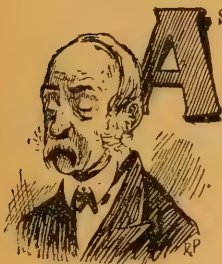
They let him go, hardly knowing what else to do, and he went back home in a wretched frame of mind. All the joy of his life had gone out as the light of a candle does when an extinguisher is placed over it by a resolute hand. Once more he saw what his babbling and folly had done for himself and others.

Happily, at that hour his wife and daughter were away from home, and Miss Elegantine Dibble was busy with household affairs, so he was able to steal up quietly to his room and sit down to think.

Thought brought him little comfort. He dreaded another quarrel with his wife, and shrank from incurring her scorn and anger, the weight of which he would assuredly be made to feel, if by any means he was the cause of the boys being robbed of the riches they had justly appropriated from the island.

CHAPTER CCCXLVI.

MISS ELEGANTINE IS CONFIDED IN.—YOUNG SCHAFFER AND STAINER FIND THEMSELVES IN A WARM COUNTRY.
—SCHAFFER PÈRE RISES IN HIS WRATH.—FINALE.



AS Mr. Farrell was unable to eat his dinner that day, the fact excited the wonder and anxiety of those who sat at the table with him. Eveline saw that he looked unwell, and was for sending for a doctor, but that he would not hear of.

"My dear," he said, "I am in as good a state of health as I shall ever be again."

"You do not take sufficient exercise," said Mrs. Farrell.

"On the contrary," he asserted, "I am suffering more from a sense of fatigue than anything. I shall rest at home this afternoon. I may be better at tea-time."

Miss Elegantine said nothing.

From her experience of the schoolmaster she knew that he was worried by something, and she was determined to get out of him what it was. Therefore, when the dinner was over, she announced that she intended to stay at home sewing, and Mrs. Farrell and Eveline went out by themselves.

The unhappy schoolmaster sat by the window with

his eyes vacantly watching the people passing by. Miss Elegantine put the room in order, and then came over and sat down beside him.

"What is it?" she asked, abruptly.

"Eh?" exclaimed Mr. Farrell, starting, and waking up from a miserable day-dream.

"I merely asked you what the worry is," said Miss Elegantine; "tell me everything, and I will put it right, or my name isn't—what it is."

"It is not a woman's matter," said Mr. Farrell, wretchedly.

"Not an ordinary woman's matter—but in some things I am as good as a man," said Miss Elegantine. "Come, now, let me draw it—like a tooth. If you wriggle about, the operation will only hurt you the more."

Mr. Farrell, who was shifting in his chair as if his seat was not comfortable, sat still for a few moments, and then suddenly blurted out:

"I'll tell you—it must come out sooner or later—I have been a fool."

"That is not exactly news. But you need not go on being a fool," she said.

"I won't," he replied; and then, in a somewhat broken fashion he told her all—how he had talked about the boys to Stainer, and of the use that most unworthy of lawyers was making of the information given him.

"Oh, that's what is the matter, is it?" said Miss Elegantine. "Very good; you just leave these gentlemen to me. Write and tell them to be here tomorrow at eleven o'clock—your dear wife and daughter will be away about that time, as there is a sale of drapery in Oxford Street, which they would not miss for the world. Then early in the morning you must take a cab, and go right down to London Bridge. There you will find a steamer which will take you to Rosherville. Go and spend a happy day there. By the time you come back, Mr. Stainer and his young friend will be settled with."

"Bless you!" exclaimed Mr. Farrell, relieved and grateful, "you are an angel."

"Not quite," said Miss Elegantine, dryly.

The letter was written and despatched to Stainer's address—a poor lodging near where he had interviewed Jim—and Miss Elegantine also despatched missives to Jim and Mr. Terry.

The result was that early in the morning these gentlemen and Morse went off to see Mr. Schaffer, senior, and revealed to him the whole of the island story, supplementing it with a statement of the conspiracy between his son and Stainer.

Meanwhile, young Schaffer and the lawyer arrived at the house of the Farrells, brimful of hope, and were there astonished to find nobody but a grim, determined-looking woman to receive them.

The interview was short, and not particularly sweet. "You two rascals," said Miss Elegantine, "have been working on the fears of a weak-minded, too garrulous man, and a prison is too good a place for you. Get out of the house!"

Then with a quick movement she whisked up from a chair beside the table a very formidable-looking copper-stick, and as the pair bolted out of the house she gave to each of them a sounding thwack on the head that made them both blind for a few moments, and led to their indulgence in language not of a class to be reproduced in print.

Young Schaffer, having nobody else on whom to vent his wrath, knocked Stainer down and went off to see his father, resolved not to work on a line of his own in the future.

But Schaffer *père* was in a boiling rage, and not being of a sentimental turn of mind, promptly kicked his offspring out of the office, telling him to go elsewhere and work for his living.

That very afternoon the curio-dealer concluded a bargain for the treasure, with the result that there was a very handsome sum for Jim and Morse, and a highly respectable amount for all the other boys.

Two days later the diamond merchant bought the jewels of Oka Wallah from Morse, and all the troubles and anxieties appertaining to the ISLAND SCHOOL came to an end.

* * * * *

The schooldays of Jim Gordon and Morse were over. Of their future lot we have little to say; but a word or two on that point may not be deemed amiss.

In due time they went to Burmah, and all they saw and did there is matter for another story.

Old friends were not forgotten, and, it may be added, sweethearts were likewise remembered. Jim never forgot Eveline, and Morse sent many a letter to Spain during his minority.

There is talk of their soon coming home, and whispers of a double wedding, in which the brides will represent much that is best of the women of England and Spain.

If the wedding takes place, as we feel sure it will, many old friends will be there.

Terry is home for a year's leave, after an arduous and successful life abroad. Trimmer, Johnny Daw,

and about a score of others will be able to show up on that auspicious occasion.

Martin and Changeling, who are partners in a thriving cyclist's shop in a country town, may be there, too. They are not very rich men, but thousands of cyclists travel past their place in the course of the week, and the usual number of breakdowns take place. Their repairing business alone is worth five hundred a year to each of them.

But there is one who will not be at the wedding, and that is Mr. Farrell, because he is gone where there are no marriages, or giving in marriage.

He survived his return to England but a year or so, and then passed peacefully away. He expressed his sorrow for the many mistakes and errors of conduct he had fallen into, and his wife was not the woman to withhold her forgiveness.

The Hidalgo Toreomez is still among the living, but very feeble. Nevertheless, he has expressed his intention of coming over with Ximena, to hand her over to Morse, now grown into a stalwart man, wise in his generation, and very popular.

And Jim is a man, too, with the bearing of one. All the boys have become men, indeed, and Miss Elegantine is much worried by the sight of the wonderful moustache her nephew has succeeded in growing.

Oscar Dibble is engaged to a young lady who declares that the said moustache is "as beautiful as a dream," and Oscar believes her. A moustache is a thing of which its possessor is invariably proud, and Dibble spent many an anxious month in developing his.

Terry lost the favour of the young lady, Oscar's *fiancée*, by pretending that he could see that Dibble had worked some false hair into his lip-ornament, as some ladies do into the coils upon their graceful heads.

But, as cheerful as ever, and the possessor of a sweetheart of his own, Terry will get over it.

Boys eight years ago, and men now, the old island life only remembered as a disordered dream—it seems scarcely possible, but it is so.

Thus do generations come and go, and not only islands, but nations, change, and the sensation of to-day is forgotten on the morrow.

Life is ever passing away, changing here, disappearing there, the whole thing like a tale that is told.



